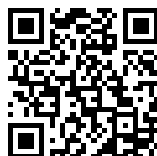

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THE BANNER of
SAINT GEORGE



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THE BANNER OF SAINT GEORGE

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PREFACE

THIS tale of the Peasant Revolt in Essex and Herts is of course an embroidery, but the framework on which it hangs is fuller of historical details than often lie ready to an author's hand. It is founded on Walsingham's Chronicle, and I have followed the details there given as far as I could, sometimes finding them so mediæval that they gave quite a shock to the picture my imagination was working at. Walsingham, or the Abbey Chronicler he quotes, seems to have had the unusual power of being able to chronicle veraciously the gallant deeds and words of a man he hated, and at the same time to relax no jot of his condemnation. The enemy of the Abbey is in his eyes a bold, bad man, who well deserves the fate he receives, and his triumph when the corpses of the patriots are hanged for the second time in chains taken off the burgesses' dogs is positively revolting: but at the same time, though Grindecobbe is portrayed by his enemy, the picture is that of a hero. After describing how Grindecobbe

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from the original

laid hands on the monks who were measuring in the town outside the Abbey wall (with the intention apparently of putting up a clay wall outside the stone one to prevent the townsmen building against the great wall of the Abbey), he tells us how the Abbot excommunicated Grindecobbe, and how he had to do penance naked (!) before the Chapter: "which was the reason that in the insurrection of the commons he raged with the greater fury, and more importunately spake to demand liberties *not only for himself, but for his neighbours, poor and unknown.*" The Chronicler is anxious to bring everything that can be brought against Grindecobbe: he tells us how he was educated, fed, and an exhibitioner at the monastery school, and was of kin to some of the monks, and was therefore, he implies, a monster of ingratitude: he tells us how he "rather extorted than obtained" the King's letter, by falling down on his knees six times before him in one morning: how he led the party who went into the Abbot's parlour with tools, and prised six millstones out of its pavement; but no deed of violence is even attributed to him. All through he acts as one who is claiming the lawful rights of his town, and when he has been taken by treachery, half tried at Hertford and released on bail, and comes, an English Regulus,

to implore his townsmen to pay no regard to his life, the Chronicler, who gives the speech, prefaces it by saying of the speaker "*cujus cor jam induratum in malo fuerat.*" When Grindecobbe, on Friday July 4, restrains the mob from attacking the Abbey, and "humanely amputating" the head of the Knight Commissioner, and communicates to them the coming arrival of Warwick and Percy to quell the riots, the Chronicler sees in the action a late repentance for his folly ; and he mentions his execution, with that of Cadynon and Barber, and 102 others, for disturbance of the King's peace without comment ; though, as we said before, he gloats over the gruesome details of the second hanging of the corpses in the dogs' chains by the townsmen who had "defamed" the Abbot. "Because, indeed, it was right that these detractors, perjured and hateful to God, should be shown to be worse than dogs, in that, their dogs being set free, they themselves should be chained and compelled to so disgusting a servitude." The strange thing is to read through the good brother's monastic hatred for the opponents of the monastery such traits of heroism, law-abidingness and moderation as appear in his account of Grindecobbe, which seem to shine out all the brighter when grudgingly told of an enemy.

The accounts of Thomas de la Mare and Prior John de la Moote, who afterwards became Abbot, are well worth studying in the "Gesta Abbatum"; Abbot Thomas, canny, wily, soft-spoken and hard-hearted, yet a religious man in his way, and one much beloved by his monks; and Prior John, who seems to have been selfish and self-indulgent, who ate by himself in his own chamber, and took no care of the sick. The latter was the prior who ran away in the midst of the riots, and whose house the townsmen sacked and destroyed and were forced to rebuild. It seems plain that the successful effort England made to rid itself of the Abbeys in Henry VIII.'s reign was rather social than religious, and that, without any grave moral scandal, the existence of these great extraneous corporations was intolerable to a nation working its way to civilisation and freedom.

The comments of Walsingham on the Hurling-time are instructive. He asks what sin can have possibly brought this mysterious trouble upon England, but it never strikes him that the oppression against which the commons rebelled may have been the sin in question. The Brother of the great Abbey thinks there may have been several causes, all wholly unconnected with himself and his order. The bishops are lax, the nobles

sceptical and irreligious, the people drunken and immoral, but *he* thinks the true cause to be the deterioration of the Mendicant Orders, which has given rise to the proverb "A friar, a liar." No doubt the Mendicant Orders, especially the Franciscans, who belonged to the lower classes, were more or less in sympathy with the rising ; but it seems quite possible that they were not so bad as the aristocratic Benedictines liked to make out, and that it is as unfair to judge them by their portraits in contemporary literature, as to judge the ordinary Nonconformist minister of fifty years back by Stiggins or Chadband, or the ordinary Church of England parson of the same date by Charles Honeyman.

I have in one respect taken a slight liberty with the English chroniclers, and that is in the account of Tiler's death, which I think according to them is unintelligible. Their account is that Tiler was on horseback when Newton rode up to him, and that he lost his temper because Newton did not dismount to give him his message ; but a moment afterwards Tiler is on foot. I believe that Tiler was on foot when Newton rode up, and objected because Newton spoke to him without dismounting, as was the usual courtesy in such cases ; and that Newton's infuriating remark was not, as given, " It is meet that I on

horseback should come to thee sitting on horseback," which would have been stupid, but "should come to thee *set on horseback*," i.e. a beggar on horseback, which must have been a highly irritating gibe, and proved too much for Tiler's self-control. The phrase I have put in the mouth of the narrator to describe Tiler's death is from Knighton.

The abstraction of Grindecobbe's corpse is an embroidery, though I think it quite possible that some of the corpses may have escaped recapture and their second hanging. The details of John Chiltern's cows, Lynham's tongue, and the penalty pronounced by the Abbot upon his traducers, are all historical. So are John Ball's verses and letters, and some part of the two sermons described. For manners and customs I am greatly indebted to Jusserand's "Wayfaring Life in the Middle Ages."

The title owes its existence to the description in Walsingham of Richard of Wallingford's arrival at St Albans bearing the King's letter, "*deferens ante eum vexillum, sive pencellum, displicatum, de armis Sancti Georgii, juxta morem illorum qui Londoniis tot scelera perpetrarunt.*"

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

CHAPTER I

THE hum of life was loud and busy in a fourteenth-century town, and scarcely anywhere was it louder and busier than in the streets of St Albans. They were malodorous, foul, and ill-paved ; but men lived and loved and fought their contests out there, and never dreamed that life could be dull.

It was a September afternoon, and the market-place was full of children playing on the spot occupied in the morning by the stalls of the market folk. The favourite game was a sort of hunt-the-slipper in which they stood round in a ring, and passed pebbles from hand to hand, singing—

“Six millstones, heigh !
Six millstones ho !
We'll keep them an we can, O !
We'll win them an we can, O !”

Outside the Fleur de Lis tavern, in French Row, there were benches where many stout and sub-

A

2 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

stantial burgesses sat with tankards of ale before them, discussing the politics of the day; and highly exciting those politics were. It is true that they centred round St Albans; but then St Albans was sharply divided into two opposing factions. The great Abbey dominated the town, and the Abbot had relations with bishops, kings, even the Pope himself—as the burgesses knew to their cost; and the townsmen were in a perpetual state of sullen revolt against the Abbey, now and then breaking out into open riot, but for the most part held in quiescence by the strong hand of successive Abbots, and by the knowledge that they might at any time, at the Abbot's pleasure, be called upon to pay a fine of three thousand marks.

The burgesses discussed many iniquities of the Abbot's over their ale;—how the Abbey was about to turn Barton Vicarage into a Rectory, and the Abbey to pocket the great tithes, for which they were to pay the Pope in fees as much as twenty years' tithe down; how the enormity of sending English money out of the country was increased by the fact that the Pope was not living at Rome, as a Pope should, but along of our natural enemies the Frenchies; how Tibson of Kingsbury had not been able to pay the Abbot's dues, and how Brother Reginald of Spalding had knocked him down, beat

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 3

him, and imprisoned him; and how when he brought an action against the Abbot, the Abbot had refused to plead, saying that Tibson was his bondsman and he might do with him what he would, and had fined Tibson further for a false complaint. And the last harrowing story had been that the Abbot had ordered John Chiltern's herd of fifty cows to be seized for distress, and by advice of his lawyer, he had given them no food, and starved all the poor beasts to death to punish their master. "You might hear them lowing a mile away till they grew too weak and dropped where they stood."

"It turns my stomach to hear the tale," said Master Barber. "And they call us English free!"

"None be free under a churchman's rule," said Master Cadyndon. "And yet we be not St Albans town, as they call us, but the free borough of Warlhamchester, founded by King Offa himself!"

"King Offa is dead a long time back," said a third man who had not before spoken. He was big, broad and florid, with blue eyes which gleamed and sparkled with every change of mood and thought, and a strong clear voice. "Methinks we may do better than be ever harking back to King Offa."

"Thou, Will Grindecobbe, throwing scorn on the venerable ancientry of our good town? I should not have thought it of thee."

4 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

"Nay, Master Barber, I say but the truth. King Offa is dead a long time back, the best part of a thousand years ; and if we be to be free burgesses of Warlhamchester once more, instead of serfs of St Alban, it is for us to up and stand for our rights. Aye, even if the Abbot calls in that three thousand marks !"

"Master Grindecobbe ! Here is a lad without, Alan Harding from Essex, that asks for speech with thee."

"Alan Harding ! Bid him come round hither at once. 'Tis the son of my good foreman Harding, that Prior Raymond took to Hatfield Priory to learn the Essex masons to work stone as they should, and his old lord that he had gone free from, a score of years, seized him and brought him back to bondage."

"I remember," said Barber : "and his wife put herself back in bondage to be with her man, and Prior Raymond took the boy, for that he was a forward scholar in the Abbey school, and kept him at Hatfield Priory to go on with his learning."

"Why did not the lord claim the boy as bondsman too ?" said Cadyndon.

"The boy was born here in this town, and the lord had no claim on him," said Grindecobbe. "Ho, Alan, good lad ! Thou hast shot up like a

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 5

young sapling. But what brings thee hither? Ill news, I fear, by thy face."

The boy of sixteen who stood before him was a lithe, handsome young fellow with a broad brow and eyes which were made to laugh, but which were now wet with unshed and hardly repressed tears.

"My good father is dead, Master," he said in a choking voice. "Prior Raymond sent me hither. He and my mother thought it was not safe for me to stay at Hatfield, and he bade me come to you."

"Will Harding dead! nay, surely! How fell it out, boy?"

"It was his lord, Sir Walter Rickdon, that did him to death," said Alan, controlling his voice with difficulty. "He set him to reap, and because he could not keep up with the others in reaping, he laid him in the stocks with the harvest sun pouring upon his head. He threatened my mother with the cart-whip when she would have held a kerchief betwixt him and the sun—and when the sun went down he lay senseless and dying. They bled him, and his sense came back to him, but he was past help, and next day he died."

"Have these lords no mercy?" said Barber.

"Not the lord of Crix, Master," said Alan. "He

6 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

even came riding up to my good father's funeral ; for the bondsfolk from all Hatfield and Ulting and Terling, and some from Witham and even from Chelmsford had come together to follow the coffin, and Master Ball was to preach to us on the green. And he had but given out his text, 'He looked for judgment but behold oppression,' when Sir Walter Rickdon and his men-at-arms rode up amongst us, and spurred their horses among the poor folk, and rode down more than one or two. But my mother rose up and stood before Sir Walter's horse, and lifted up her hands and cried 'Out upon thee, wicked man ! Fearest thou not the vengeance of the Lord which is now on the road, when thou shalt cry for mercy and find none ?' And with that she swooned upon the ground, and I thought she was dead too ; but the women took her and brought her round, and Dame de Rivers offered her a home."

"But methinks the law might have something to say to a man's being thus done to death," said Cadyndon the miller.

"The Prior," said Alan, "had it brought before the Manor Court for manslaughter, but that unfrocked priest, Joseph Ash, who does all Sir Walter's dirty work, and knows the law from end to end, pleaded for him that the law was on his

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 7

side, and that my good father had died by visitation of God, and they gave him not so much as a fine. There were many that were ready to blame Sir Walter, even among the gentry themselves, and Dame de Rivers of Faulkbourn hath hired my mother's service from Sir Walter that she might not have to serve my father's murderer. Mother thought if you knew it, Master, you might have hired her of him that she might return hither; but Sir Walter said nay, if Dame Rivers hired his bondswoman, well and good, he could lay hands on her when he would, but go into the shires she should not."

"I would I had cut my hand off before I let Will Harding go into Essex!" said Grindecobbe. "But what else could I do? I spoke to Lawyer Parker and asked if it were safe for Harding to go back to Hatfield Peverel seeing that he was born a bondsman, and he said that so long as he kept off Crix estate, which was his nest, he could not be seized."

"Aye, Master," said Alan, "but Joseph Ash said that a man's nest is his parish, and that anywhere in Hatfield Peverel he might be seized, and he made the justices believe him——"

"I know, I know," said Grindecobbe. "The law that ought to be the stay of the poor is turned to

8 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

their torment. And so the good Prior hath sent thee hither?"

"Aye, Master, he said he knew not what Sir Walter might do next, and that if he seized me, he knew not but that he might override the law by some quibble of Joseph Ash's, and that I was safer outside the parish, and he said that he would be at my charge to apprentice me if thou wouldst find me a master."

"A master! we will see to that, my lad: the first thing, it seems to me, is to find thee a father, or something in the place of one, and here stand I, William Grindecobbe, to fulfil that charge. Come home now with me, and we will find thee some food to hearten thee up and a shakedown in the lads' chamber for thee to lie on."

It was a very little way from the Fleur de Lis tavern to Master Grindecobbe's house, and thither the two walked together, Grindecobbe's great arm laid protectingly upon Alan Harding's shoulder. When they reached the door, which stood at the top of three stone steps, and was flanked on either side by stone mullioned, latticed windows, of coarse opaque glass, Grindecobbe knocked three times, and the door was opened by a little girl of twelve or so in a long frock and pointed white cap, under which escaped obstinately curly dark hair.

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 9

"Here is an old friend: dost thou know him, Maudlen?" he said.

The child looked at Alan a little uncertainly for a moment; then her face lighted up with recognition. "Why, 'tis Alan!" she said. "And where is dear Nurse Pernel?"

"She is in Essex," said Alan, smiling down at the bright little face, in spite of the weight at his heart.

"Alan has lost his good father, little one," said Grindecobbe, "and poor Nurse Pernel is sad and sorrowful. He is coming now to live with us, and we must make him as happy as we can; so do thou begin by fetching something out of the buttery for him to eat. That is right; some bread and beef and a jack of ale make all a man can need. Lay to, Alan, lay to."

"Master," said Alan, who had been struggling in vain to utter something of the gratitude of his heart, "I have not said a word of thanks, but it is not that I feel none——"

"Thanks? Leave them alone, my lad. It is I that have a debt to pay thee, in that I believed Lawyer Parker, and sent good Harding to his death, alack the day. Henceforth thou art as one of my own sons."

And then Alan Harding, overcome by the good

10 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

man's generous kindness, laid his head upon his arms and cried. "If ever I get a chance to pay your kindness back, Master—" he faltered.

When the day came that Alan got that chance, he did not fail in his vow.

CHAPTER II

FOUR years before this Alan Harding had been a scholar at the Abbey school, which gave education to all sorts and conditions of boys, if they had sufficient brains and industry to make it worth the master's while to teach them. William Harding's wife, Pernel Harding, had brought up little Maudlen Grindecobbe when her mother died at her birth, and it was partly out of gratitude for the fostering of this delicate baby, the only girl of the family, that William Grindecobbe had got Alan into the Abbey school. He was not himself in good odour with the Abbey, but he had two brothers who were Brethren, and a bright intelligent lad was always welcomed by the monk who for the time being held the office of schoolmaster. When Alan was at school, this office was held by a certain Brother Raymond, whose desire for employment directly useful to his fellow-creatures was a permanent surprise to the Abbey. He won Alan's lifelong devotion, and thought the boy so promising that

12 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

when he was promoted to the Priory of Hatfield Peverel in Essex he took the boy with him to continue his education, and he still kept him there when William Harding was seized by Sir Walter Rickdon, and reduced back to the bondage out of which he flattered himself he had escaped when twenty years before he and his wife, in the disorganization of labour caused by the great pestilence, had tramped up to St Albans for work, and when he had been taken on as a mason by Grindecobbe.

It must be owned that Alan liked the stir of St Albans better than the quiet village life of Hatfield Peverel. There had been fun and life in the streets of the town, and perpetual tussles between the smaller prentices, whose battle cry was "Warlham!" (Verulam) and the schoolboys who shouted out "Alban!" After his father had been seized by Sir Walter Rickdon, and set to field labour instead of the mason's work in which he excelled, the fact that his father and mother were living in the village did not greatly cheer his life. The Prior, however, was always kind to him, and brought him on well with his education, perhaps finding an eager and responsive pupil a pleasant change after his Brethren, whom he longed to make into an ideal community, but who stoutly resisted his efforts.

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 13

Alan's education doubtless had progressed the better for his sojourn at Hatfield Peverel Priory.

He came back to St Albans less boyish in mind than most of his contemporaries. When a lad has stood by his father's dying bed, and heard a faint voice saying, "Boy, thou hast learnt a deal, and it may be thou wilt be a prosperous man some day, but take heed thou side never with the oppressors, but always with them that are poor and down-trodden"—he is likely to put more of his heart than another would into any struggle for liberty that may be going on. And such a struggle was filling all men's minds at St Albans now, and had done so for many years back.

The state of things was this. St Albans was not a town containing a minster so much as a minster dominating a town. Once a band of worthy monks had settled in the old town of Verulam, cultivated and civilized the surrounding country, and made it possible for the town to grow under its shadow out of barbarism into civilization. But the town had proved a growing organism, and so had the minster. The minster had become a property - holding corporation, governed and managed by able and educated men, who looked upon it as a religious duty to advance its interests ; and whenever the interests of the town clashed

14 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

with those of the minster, the minster was apt to get the better of it, both from its own able management and from its access to powerful friends. The minster had built a mill or a bridge, and charged a toll to recoup itself for the expense; and when the townsmen wished for their own mill or bridge, the minster refused to allow such building as competing with its rights. If any resistance on the part of the town was rumoured, one of the Brotherhood went to court—sometimes even to Rome itself—and when the town pleaded its rights, the Abbey showed a grant overriding all previous claims. If the town went to law with the Abbey, the case had to be tried in the Abbot's court, and by his own judges. This did not predispose the townsmen to satisfaction with the verdict.

When Alan Harding lived at St Albans, the Abbot was a certain Thomas de la Mare, who now lies buried to the south of the great altar. He was a fine, tall, masterful man, whose merits and demerits, according to his monks, may be found described to-day in the "*Gesta Abbatum*." He had inherited despotic traditions from his predecessor Abbot Richard the Leper, who wore a white linen mask over his face, yet ruled town and minster alike with a rod of iron. In Abbot

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 15

Richard's days had been the mill riots, when the Abbey had pulled down the town watermills, and cemented their six millstones into the pavement of the Abbot's parlour, while thirteen handmills, used in different parts of the town, were brought to the Abbey to be broken up. The town had gradually lost the right to fish in its own streams, to pasture its cattle on its own commons and to hunt its own game; and if it infringed any of these regulations Abbot Thomas might call on the townsfolk to pay a fine of three thousand marks, for which they had been bound to be on their good behaviour since the days of Abbot Richard.

But what most exasperated the burgesses was that the Abbey was not content with its temporal hold over its town opponents, but brought spiritual penalties to reinforce them. Thus if a man opened a school he was excommunicated, lest the Abbey school should be injured; and this seemed highly unfair to the sturdy Englishman of the fourteenth century, like fighting an unarmed man with a dagger. This abuse of spiritual penalties brought its own punishment. The claims of the Pope, always unpopular, were openly decried, and laymen gave utterance freely to their discontent when no priests or monks were by.

16 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

Alan had his own business to see to, however, as well as to take his part in the politics of the town. His career had to be decided upon, and here for the first time he showed Grindcobbe that he had views of his own as to his duty.

Grindcobbe had well fulfilled his promise of treating him like his own son: he had been put upon an equality with Will, Jack and Hal Grindcobbe, subject to the same discipline and bound by the same rules. The household was kindly though strictly ordered, although Grindcobbe had been left a widower for the second time. He had once dutifully conformed to the conduct then expected from a widowed husband, and had given his children a stepmother; but perhaps the experiment had not been a very happy one, for he had not tried it a second time, and his widowed sister, Mistress Page, presided over the household and brought up little Maudlen.

This little maiden, a slight, dark creature with great eyes and dark curls under her cap, was a great contrast to her big, florid, ruddy father with his sunshiny blue eyes: but, perhaps she was all the dearer to him because she reminded him so much of her dead mother, the one love of his life. To Alan she was like the last remaining bit of the old home near the Waxhouse Gate, where the

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 17

family had lived before Harding went to Hatfield, and Maudlen had been nursed, and she was the only creature within his ken who had any connection with the mother whom he thought of oftener than he spoke of her.

Alan's liking for books was a tie between himself and his master which his master's sons did not share ; for none of the three Grindecobbe lads were nearly so able in intellect as their father. Grindecobbe had had a superior education ; he had been a pupil at the Abbey school, and sent to Oxford with an exhibition from the Abbey, with the idea of being trained for the priesthood ; but when the two elder sons died in one of those waves of pestilence which again and again swept over England after the Black Death, his father, who needed a son of his age to help him in his business, took him from Oxford, and compounded with Heaven by placing the two lads next to him in the Abbey. William Grindecobbe had a tall powerful frame, a big voice, a kind heart, much generous indignation at wrongs suffered by others, and clear knowledge of his own mind ; and he had for some time been looked upon as chief leader of the burgesses in their opposition to the encroachments of the Abbey, all the more because he was essentially a law-abiding Englishman, and based

B

18 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

his resistance on what he held to be the lawful rights of the town.

When Alan's career came to be decided on, Grindecobbe made him the offer of taking him as one of his prentices in the stone-cutting yard, an offer which was a better one than the bondsman's son had a right to expect, as it would have not only given him a definite social place in the town, but would have assured him a prosperous career in the future. But Alan, perhaps for the first time opposing the master, demurred.

"'Tis not for want of gratitude in my heart, Master," he said with reddening cheeks, and eyes less clear than usual; "but were I once bound prentice, I should be shut up within the walls of the town for seven years, and my heart is sore for a sight of my poor mother, now and again. She has none left but me."

"But what wouldst thou do, boy?" said the master. "The last thing she desires is to have thee in bondage with her."

"If I could get bound to some chapman that travels through the country, to carry his pack, maybe, I might go visit my mother, if his work lay in Essex," said Alan rather doubtfully.

"No lazy loons or vagabond chapmen for me!" said Grindecobbe rather angrily. "A man

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 19

who makes his living on the roads is never to be trusted."

"Good father," here little Maudlen put in her word, "doth not Master Piper's brother make his living on the roads? Methought the good Prior told us how he came in the nick of time to heal him of a calenture. And sure he is a good man, and to be trusted."

Grindecobbe was always gentle to his little daughter. "Sweetheart, Master Peter Piper is an apothecary, and no chapman."

"Then why not apprentice Alan to an apothecary?" said Maudlen, "sure he is a good lad to crave to go and succour dear Nurse Pernel."

Little Maudlen's wise suggestion worked in her father's mind. It could not be denied that a son's duty was to succour his mother. Alan did not mind what trade he was bound to, so long as it was one which would bring him from time to time within reach of Pernel; and finally it was arranged that he should be bound prentice to the above-mentioned apothecary Peter Piper. Piper's brother Thomas kept an apothecary's shop in Dagnall Street; but Peter travelled during the summer half of the year between St Albans and London, and between London and Colchester, drawing teeth, letting blood, and administering drugs in the villages

20 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

which lay alongside these two high roads. Alan was to work in the drug-shop during the winter, and in the summer travel on the roads, when twice or thrice during the summer journeys he would have an opportunity to see his mother at Faulkbourn.

This plan was agreed to grudgingly by Grindecobbe. He said that a travelling leech was a kind of vagabond, that a rolling stone gathers no moss, and that he had always hoped to see Alan Harding granted the freedom of the town ; but he finally turned round and consented, saying, " Good lad, thou art sober and God-fearing, and I cannot stay thee from putting thine afflicted mother before the prosperity of the world. Wherefore I will see the two Pipers, and deal with them concerning thee."

Alan was apprenticed to Peter Piper, but as the brothers had little house-room, he still boarded at Grindecobbe's. After a month he pulled out Jack Grindecobbe's aching tooth, and Jack knocked him down. After two months an incident happened which so excited him that it was a mercy that he did not poison all his master's patients by giving them the wrong drugs ; but happily if so they did not find it out.

It arose out of "strained relations" between the Abbey and the town.

Abbot Thomas was a man of fine presence and

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 21

honeyed manners, but the burgesses knew him to be one of the hardest of men. Never did he relinquish an advantage, however small, for the minster, and never did he fail to grasp at a chance of gain, whether in rights or in land, when he asserted what he held to be rights already. When it was said of him that his sanctity was such that he had himself scourged every Friday by his own monks, the burgesses were wont to wish that they could change places with those monks, and lay it on with a will.

One of the chronic disputes between the town and the Abbey was just at this time raging fiercely. The townsmen *would* build against the Abbey wall, and one had been so misguided as to make a window in the wall looking into the Sacrist's garden, which was doubtless annoying. To stop such enormities, the Abbot resolved to build an outer mud wall as a boundary beyond which the townsmen were not allowed to erect buildings, and for that purpose he sent two monks, a priest and a lay brother, with measuring instruments to measure the townsmen's gardens, and to command them to take down any buildings within the forbidden range. Grindecobbe was building a house for one of the townsmen, and one day his foreman came to him in great indignation, in the midst of an angry crowd, telling him

22 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

that the two brethren had commanded his men to stop working, saying that they were building too near the Abbey wall, and that the work must be recommenced further back.

Alan, who was compounding boluses in the apothecary's shop, saw Grindecobbe in the midst of a concourse of people, many of whom were poor folk whose homes were threatened by the Abbot's encroachment. Alan seldom played truant, but this time the temptation was too much for him. He gave his master the slip, and got to the place in time to see Grindecobbe walk up to the monks and bid them desist from measuring. "The Abbot has no right outside the Abbey wall," he said peremptorily.

"The Abbey wall, inside or outside, is ours, and we will have no houses built to abut against it. Our orders be plain enough."

"My masters," said Grindecobbe, "no man's orders avail without lawful authority."

"Our authority is better than yours," said the Brother, "even as the Blessed Alban is higher than a greasy burgess, who eats meat on fast-days when none see him."

"Easy, easy," said Grindecobbe, "the folk are in no jesting mood."

"Nor we," answered the monk, "it is no jest

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 23

when we threaten the foes of the Blessed Alban with the vengeance of the Abbot. How about that fine of three thousand marks?"

By this time Grindecobbe and the monks were in the midst of an angry crowd, and the measuring line of one of the monks was snatched from him and broken over his back. Grindecobbe cried shame, and they desisted before any worse blows had fallen; but not before the two brethren had called everyone to witness that they had been assaulted in the discharge of their duty.

The crowd dispersed, but a group of burgesses surrounded Grindecobbe, all advising him in various ways to do something to appease the Abbot, who would not fail to visit this offence upon the offender; but here Grindecobbe was stubborn. "My masters, I am guiltless of the beating of the brethren. But for me they would have had their gowns torn off their backs, if nothing worse."

"We shall suffer, if thou mak'st not thy peace with the Abbot."

"Tell the Abbot, then, that I am responsible for the coil," said Grindecobbe with scorn.

"But a fine offered to appease the Abbot for thee——"

"I will have none of such appeasement. I stand, not for my own rights, but the rights of

24 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

the town. If the Abbey meddles with what is none of theirs, the Abbey will meet the fate of meddlers."

Then followed a pretty quarrel. No one talked of anything but Grindecobbe, and Grindecobbe's stubbornness in sticking for the rights of the town, and what the Abbot would do to Grindecobbe. His two brothers in the Abbey cut him dead; but Grindecobbe went on his way, attending to his work and showing no signs of remorse. At last, one bright winter's day, when all the town was in the minster to hear the Epiphany mass, the Grindecobbes and Alan among the rest, after the creed had been sung, the Abbot himself came forward to the altar steps, and read in the clearly pronounced Latin, which was no dead language to any educated person :—

"Since I, Thomas, Abbot of St Albans, have admonished William Grindecobbe of this town with regard of the offence which he committed on the second day of November last, in assaulting and beating, and staying from their work two of the brethren of this Abbey, to the great dishonour of the Blessed Alban; and since his contumacy requireth further punishment; I hereby pronounce sentence of excommunication against the said William Grindecobbe, and command that all good

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 25

Christian people avoid his company, till such time that he shall humbly submit himself to the Church, in the name of the Blessed Trinity, Amen."

Grindecobbe stooped down and felt for his cap under the seat, and then less ruddy than usual, but with an unmoved face, stepped from among the rest, and walked down the nave, and out at the great west door. His sons and Alan made as if to come out with him, but he forbade them with a look to follow, and they stayed. But when he got outside, a small hand was thrust into his, and he saw his little daughter Maudlen, her dark eyes blazing with loving indignation.

"Child," he said, smiling, "thou shouldst not have followed me out."

"Was I to let my father come out by himself?" said the little maid, and began to cry.

Half the burgesses of St Albans gathered that afternoon at Grindecobbe's. They had no notion of avoiding his company; but their wrath was great on his behalf. It is one thing, they said, to fine or imprison a man's body, and quite another to imperil his immortal soul. Some of the bolder among the burgesses, who were not untouched by the spirit of the coming time, were for his facing the excommunication, and making no effort to

26 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

remove it by doing penance on the coming Ash Wednesday ; some of these were good men enough, but most cared little for religion, while they cared much for seeing the town brave the Abbey. But the graver and more respectable burgesses thought an excommunication no slight thing. "It is no light matter," said Master Cadyndon, "to be cut off from the holy sacraments and all church fellowship, and death is uncertain ; wherefore I for one shall not blame you, brother Grindecobbe, should you do penance. The Abbot hath the advantage of weapons."

Grindecobbe thought the matter well over. Long after he told Alan that he might, for the town's sake, have thought it right to brave the excommunication, but that the thought of his children stayed him. "For," said he, "the children of the excommunicate for the most part grow up without religion, and for their sakes I determined to do penance." So, to spare his brothers' feelings, it was permitted that he should do his penance in the choir, before the Chapter only, instead of before the whole town ; but to punish him, he was commanded to do his penance as nearly unclothed as was compatible with decency.

On Ash Wednesday morning, therefore, Grindecobbe, stripped to his shirt, with ashes on his head,

and a great taper in his hand, knelt bare-kneed on the stone pavement, while the choir sang the Miserere. Alan, who by the favour of his old singing master, the precentor, had a nook where he could see and hear, himself unseen, told his "brothers" the story. "He knelt throughout with a steadfast countenance," he said, "neither proud nor humble, but unashamed; while the brethren nudged one another and mocked him under their breath as loud as they durst, till I longed to have the task of their Lenten scourging. I would have laid on with a will."

"And was anyone there except the brethren?" asked Jack Grindecobbe.

"Sure enough, there was Perrers and his kind. I saw Dick Perrers grinning from ear to ear, just as he used to do, when he had got another boy into trouble at school. He will make a worthy squire for the Abbot."

"Why does the Abbot want a squire?" said Hal. "A churchman needs not to have his arms carried for him."

"'Tis to do his dirty work," said Will, the silent eldest son.

CHAPTER III

THE spring drew on, when Alan was to leave the drug-shop, and go on his first travels with Peter Piper. The afternoon before he started his master sent him to Smallford to fetch his horse, which through the winter was stabled there at a farm. The lad whistled a song as he swung along, for the spring was in his veins, and the meadows were full of cowslips—paigles he called them, as east country folk do now. As he went along the meadow path, which was divided by a stile from the next meadow, he saw leaning against the stile a well-clad youth, with a blue velvet cloak, apparently waiting for two girls who were coming towards the stile with a basket of cowslips, for this was the time for brewing "paigle wine." Shading his eyes from the sun, Alan saw that the maidens were Nance, the Grindcobbes' servant, and Maudlen Grindcobbe: and further, that the young gallant who evidently intended to waylay them at the stile, was an old schoolfellow of his,

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 29

a youth whose school record had left the proverb behind him, "He plays foul, like Dick Perrers."

Alan was at the stile nearly as soon as the girls, but not before Dick Perrers had threatened to throw away the girls' paigles unless they paid him the toll of a kiss. Nance looked not altogether unwilling to be coerced, but Maudlen was alarmed and indignant, and relief appeared in her face when she saw Alan.

"Quit teasing of these honourable maidens, Dick Perrers," said Alan, "and reckon with me in their place!"

"Ho, mason's lad," responded Perrers, "go back to thy hod, and meddle not with thy betters!"

This was the opening of the quarrel, which beginning with remarks of the kind which have been heard in every age of the world when youths have fallen out about a girl, proceeded to blows. Nance and Maudlen, as is also the wont of the unsophisticated maiden of all ages, stood looking on, crying at intervals, "Oh, oh! Good Lord, he will be slain! They will kill each other! Will no one part them? Holy Saints, stop them!"

They were stopped, though by no holy saint. A stern voice said, "Richard Perrers, what dost thou here, brawling with a common prentice?" and the youth's father laid hold of his son to make

30 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

him desist. He hauled him off with a contemptuous word to the girls which made Nance redden, Maudlen pale, and Alan dance with fury.

Dick Perrers was a couple of years older and heavier than Alan, and had blacked his opponent's eyes: Alan spent his last evening with his face bandaged with raw beef, and was still somewhat damaged in beauty when he went off next morning with his new master. Grindecobbe, however, thanked him for his championship of the maidens.

"A Perrers is ever in mischief," he said. "The brood were spawned for the damage of England first, and of their own neighbourhood beside. There was Alice Perrers in the old King's time, who gave herself the airs of a queen; and now this brother of hers, who cannot be made lord since he is not of noble blood, ruffles it like a fine gentleman in the Abbot's service."

"Aye, Master," said Alan, "he was as angry that his son should fight with me as the old Duke might be to see King Richard at play with a beggar."

"'Tis always the way with upstarts," said Grindecobbe.

Next morning Alan and his master started on their way. Maudlen brought Alan a purse for a farewell gift, but though he thanked her, his mind was fuller of the new adventures to which he was

going than of the sentiment that filled the little maiden's heart. "Let me give it to my mother from her nursing," he said. "She will be pleased that thou hast not forgotten her, Maudlen."

Maudlen consented, being too proud to do anything else, but when Alan was gone she cried as if her heart would break. She could bear Alan to go away—but he might have kept her purse for himself!

In those days it was customary for two men to ride on one horse, but horses were bred for strength rather than speed, and Alan soon came to prefer walking by his master's side to jogging along behind him, without anything to do with the management of the animal. He was a lithe, long-legged lad, with little weight of his own to carry and plenty of muscle: and the stages of their journey were seldom more than ten or fifteen miles. When they reached a village, Piper put up at the tavern, and sent Alan down the street to cry "A leech, a leech! All that would be made whole of their sickness, or have their teeth drawn or their blood let, come to Master Piper, the best apothecary on these roads, at the sign of the Red Fox, for two days and no more!" The first to flock to Master Piper were sure to be mothers, with sickly children, and mostly doubtful as to the expense of the

32 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

doctor's drugs : but as Piper had drugs for the poor which cost him little or nothing, and depended chiefly on faith for their efficacy, he was able to doctor many at very small cost. The mothers were followed by better-paying patients, who had a great opinion of Master Piper's skill : and indeed he was no quack, but a fairly skilful doctor for his day, who was recognised as having passed at Apothecaries' Hall. His travelling career was not chosen from necessity, but from personal preference.

Alan Harding, who knew little of the ways of remote villages, was often shocked to find how large a part sheer hunger played in the lives of these poor folk. On church lands, such as Hatfield Priory, all who were in want could get doles from the convent door, and at St Albans the Abbey stood between the poor and starvation : but here, in the country villages, matters were very different. With us the world's supply of corn equalises the needs of various countries : but at that time each village lived upon its own crops, and these did not last out through the year. In the spring and summer, when the old corn was eaten and the new not cut, people lived chiefly upon wild roots and herbs, except those blest with gardens which grew kale. Some had a goat for milking, or a few fowls

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 33

which laid eggs at this time, but so many had the diseases of starvation, that Piper could only tell them that Master Harvest was the leech for them.

Piper and his prentice travelled to London, which Alan had never seen. He gazed open-mouthed at the great city with its seven gates, and its two rivers (since converted into sewers) which then flowed into the Thames. He could have stood all day in the street called Chepe, where the chapmen cried for ever, "Come buy ! come buy !" But his master's business lay by the waterside, where he had to lay in a store of drugs, which were newer and better if you bought them at the wharf side ; and there he taught Alan to bargain with Moors and Jews, calling out the name of the drug, and holding up his fingers or a coin to show his price. Master Piper also carried one pack filled with books, which he bought in Paternoster Row ; and these were mostly copies of two works, which he said were much in demand in the country, the various parts of Wiclif's Bible, and the " Vision of Piers Plowman." Once Piper pointed out to him the poet Chaucer, a merry-faced man with a gay-coloured cloak, ambling upon a Spanish jennet. His appearance showed plainly that he was one of the great people, who rode the streets with bright silk and velvet cloaks

C

34 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

over their glittering armour, and their horse-cloths down to the fetlock, embroidered with gold and silver.

But the sight that struck him most was the sight of young King Richard as he rode out to parliament. The King was then a beautiful boy with the straight fair features of the Plantagenets ; his long golden hair curled over his shoulders under the red velvet cap with a gold circlet, and his merry blue eyes shone with youth and health. It was Alan's first sight of him, but it was not to be the last.

When they left London to go into Essex, passing through Bishopsgate to Shoreditch, there Alan saw, herded outside the city walls, the most wretched assembly of people he could have met on earth. They were the submerged remnant of London in the middle ages, driven outside the gates by a strict municipal government, but uncared for by state or church. There Alan saw, creeping into the sun out of their foul huts where they breathed poisoned air and drank poisoned water, lepers nearly transformed out of human semblance, consumptives and fever-stricken and worse : cutpurses and outcasts of both sexes to whom none had ever thought of ministering but the Grey Friars of St Francis. Alan would have had his master try to

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 35

help some of these poor creatures, but Piper assured him that it was not safe to linger, for the hand of the law did not reach here.

Thence they came into the fresh air and breezy fields of Bethnal Green ; here they were again in the country, and Piper recommenced his work among the villages. Hence they journeyed on slowly, through rough roads which ran between hedges blossoming with blackthorn above banks of primroses and sweet violets. At Springfield, Piper was called to attend the children of a certain knight in smallpox, with whom he anticipated a nineteenth-century treatment, for he kept his patients behind scarlet hangings, thus excluding the chemical rays of light. During his detention here, he sent Alan on to Faulkbourn to see his mother, bidding him tell no man that his name was Harding for fear of Sir Walter Rickdon ; for though Sir Walter had no lawful rights over a man born in Hertfordshire, no one knew how he might wrest the law in his favour. From henceforth, therefore, Alan called himself after his profession, Alan Leech.

Trusting in his position as an unknown traveller, Alan turned aside from the high road on his way to Faulkbourn to visit the Prior Raymond at Hatfield. Raymond welcomed him warmly, and questioned him much of his travels, and the state

36 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

of the people he had seen on his way. When Alan spoke of the wretched people he had seen at Shore-ditch, and wondered that no good churchman sought to help them, the Prior sighed and covered his face with his hands. Then he made Alan tell him of the country people who were dying of starvation because they could not make their scanty crops last till the new crops came in, and said, "God forgive us who eat and drink our fill and regard not our poor brethren!"

"Methinks, sir," said Alan, "if the gentry would be more merciful, things would not be so ill for the poor folk."

"How?" said the Prior.

"It is my master that tells me this, sir," said Alan modestly, "and he says that, since the great sickness, folk's strength is no longer what it was, and that they have more burdens, not less, put on them by their lords. For now that no bondsman may escape his master, but may be searched for and brought back to bondage, the lords have all the power in their hands, and they often misuse their power."

"It is too true," said the Prior. "Yet, good Alan, even some of us need pity and forgiveness rather than hatred——"

"Sir," said Alan, much out of countenance,

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 37

getting very red, "sure you know I spoke not of such as you."

"It is not thy words, Alan, it is my own heart that speaks," said the Prior. "There is One above who hears the prayer of the poor and helpless, and His mills grind sure though slow. When He avenges the poor, may He have mercy on those who were not free from oppression, yet took part with the oppressors against their will!"

Though Alan little suspected it, the Prior had even then sent a letter to St Albans beseeching the Abbot to allow him to give up his Priorship, and to give him instead the cure of souls in some poor vicarage. The "accidie" of the brethren at the Priory had been too much for him; not a single soul had been stirred by his eager enthusiasm; they let him say his say, and took no further notice of what he said. He was like a race-horse trying to drag an immovable waggon, and the waggon was all the more immovable that the brethren knew that no complaints of them from their Prior were likely to take much effect with the Abbot. When Alan next came that way he found a new Prior in possession, and Prior Raymond departed for ever.

Unconscious, however, of the coming change, Alan went on to Faulkbourn to see his mother.

38 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

Dame Rivers of Faulkbourn Hall, who had befriended her by hiring her service from Sir Walter Rickdon, was a highly respected widow lady, who lived in the midst of a green park through which ran a clear little stream, which later, grown slow and muddy, turned the Witham mills. She had placed Pernel Harding in a thatched cottage on the bank of this stream to care for and tend her own old nurse; the cottage stood under a spreading elm, and the little stream prattled past it through banks of blue forget-me-not and pink willow-herb, while small fish darted about in its clear shallows. When Alan came to the cottage, his mother was kneeling on a board washing clothes in the stream; as she saw the tall lad advancing towards her she stood up from her work, meagre and haggard, looking like one who has fought a hard battle with life. Then she trembled all over, and then she fell on his neck, crying, "My lad, my lad!"

"Nay," she said later, "I have naught to complain of here. The Dame is good to me, and old Agnes Fenn has known trouble herself; and if I could only once see the wicked punished, I could follow thy father in peace."

"Nay, mother, I could not spare thee too," said Alan, putting his strong young arm around her as they stood.

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 39

She did not heed his caress. "'Tis not that I would take the matter into my hands," she said. "God Almighty, He will punish : but I would He would give me the chance to help Him." And as she gradually repeated to him her story, and that of others, in a dry, dispassionate, tearless voice, Alan's young heart burned within him at her narratives of heartless cruelty and oppression, and he began to feel as if there were only three sets of people in the world, oppressors, oppressed, and those who sought to set the oppressed free.

Alan was to stay three days near his mother ; and on the second day a man came up and said to her in an undertone, " I was bidden to tell thee, mistress, that Master Ball be to preach to-morrow before the church gate on the Cheping Hill at Witham." Pernel and Alan, accordingly, walked over to Witham Church, and took their place among the groups of people waiting for the sermon on the green in front of the church gate. Sunday was the market day at Witham, and the market was held on the green, so that church-goers could combine religion and business.

When Mass was over, a swarthy, powerfully built man in a worn cassock, came out to the people to preach. He had black eyes which, when his oratory expressed his own feelings, glowed with

40 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

fire ; and his voice had that penetrating tone which sways crowds. He did not begin, he said, with a text from Holy Writ ; his text was to be something they had all seen and understood, namely, a mill. " Not," said he, looking down westward to the water-mill which ground corn for the manor, " a mill like that yonder, driven by the water of a stream which the lords and gentry may claim for their own. Nay, the mill of my text is a wind-mill, driven by the free blast of heaven which none may turn for himself, which beareth aloft its arms like a holy cross, that it may grind the fruits of the earth into wholesome food for man."

Then John Ball went on to speak of the work of the mill, and Alan saw that though no word he said could have been called sedition, there was an undercurrent of meaning which his hearers seemed to understand, for at certain points they looked at one another and half smiled. " Remember this, good folk," he said : " we cannot make good bread with flour unevenly ground, but all kernels must be ground to the same fineness. Here we see great and little kernels, great lords and little serfs : but in God's sight they be all one, and He willeth to make good bread of us all. The four sails of His mill be Right and Might, and Skill and Will ; and all men must have Right and

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 41

Might and Skill and Will, to help to make His mill go round."

Then as his voice grew in power and in eagerness, he spoke of the millstones and their work, and the power of the Holy Wind of Heaven—the Spirit—to make the sails go round and turn the mill. "And when the grinding is done, then shall England be merry England again, for all shall be free, and shall be equal before men, as now before God. Why," said he, with lifted arms and kindled eyes, "why should men keep one another in bondage? we be all come from one mother, Eve, and one father, even Adam. Why should some dwell in fair houses, and sleep on down, and feast off gold and silver, while others have the pain and the travail, rain and wind in the fields; and by the sweat and blood of some, others maintain their estates?"

Alan listened spellbound. All this was in the air of the day and John Ball only said what many men thought; but the first time a lad hears the unformed thought of the time put into words is for ever memorable to him.

"Now for the end," said John Ball; "heed ye my words, good people, one and all. England is the mill of God; Jack Miller, he is each man here that will have God's mill worked aright; and the

42 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

kernels must be ground small, small ; and the mill must have his four sails to work him and his post to stand firm in faith. And now I will that ye say after me these verses, and that ye learn them to every man that will hear ; for the day of the grinding is at hand." And in his clear voice he spoke, and the people repeated, till they knew them by heart, these lines :

"Jack Miller asketh help
To turn his mill aright ;
He will grind small, small ;
The King's Son of Heaven shall pay for all.
Look thy mill go right with four sails,
And the post stand in steadfastness ;
With might and right,
With skill and will.
Let might help right,
And skill before will,
And right before might,
Then goeth our mill aright ;
But if might go before right,
And will before skill,
Then is our mill misdight."

"That is a godly priest, Alan," said Pernel to her son as they walked away ; "when I hear him speak, meseems that God Almighty hath not forgot us poor folk."

After Alan's visit to his mother was ended, he rejoined his master upon the road. By this time it was high summer, and all kinds of people were

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 43

abroad upon the roads, whom Alan had to make acquaintance with for the first time. There were the travelling quacks, from whom Peter Piper held himself proudly aloof: men who, when they came into a place, set up a red and gold tent, and described themselves as servants to the wise woman, Dame Trote of Salerno, whose eyebrows hung down with silver chains, and who sent them into the forests to slay wild beasts, out of whose gall she compounded drugs to cure every disease. There were the wandering dancers and minstrels who were more merry than wise, and from whom Piper kept his young prentice rigidly apart: though once when one little glee-maiden of nine, who danced on her hands with her feet in the air, cut her palm badly with a sharp stone, Piper doctored her for nothing, and threw in an admonition to her father on bringing her up to so ill a calling. There were friars of all kinds: some grave and sober men who plied their calling for love of the Cross, and others mere vagabonds, always ready for a cup of ale and a warm corner by a farmer's fire: while others, though hardly saints, and often coarse-spoken and uncultured, were merry good-humoured fellows with a jest for everyone, and well-meaning in spite of their rough manners. One of these, whom Alan and Peter often came across in their travels, was Friar Appleton; a

44 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

stout, rosy, smiling man, always ready to pass the time of day with everyone. There were, besides these, other travelling companions, who were at all costs to be avoided; masterless men-at-arms, swaggering knights with their retinue—Alan once saw Rickdon himself sitting in a tavern bawling for sack, and went without his dinner rather than eat in his company—sturdy beggars and impostors who pretended to be maimed and lepers in order to win alms from the charitable, and who had more than once been detected by Piper's keen eye. All these Alan learnt to deal with, and when he returned to St Albans, he had seen so much of the varieties of human nature that he became sought out among his companions as a travelled prentice, who had many good stories to tell.

CHAPTER IV

IT was the year 1381, and Alan, now a tall, well set-up young man, was again starting for his spring travels with his master. In the winter he lived the life of the ordinary prentice in the drug-shop; he could bend a good bow, and beat most youths of his years at quarter-staff; he had entered fully into the public and private interests of the town, and had once been hopelessly in love with his master's niece, Thomas Piper's daughter Bess, only to be cured when she married an elderly mercer. His confidante during this passion had been Maudlen Grindcobbe, who, however angry she had been with Bess Piper for her non-appreciation of Alan, had certainly been much relieved when that young lady's coming marriage was announced; and since then he had arrived at the conclusion that no Bess Piper was worth the tip of Maudlen's little finger. The little dark-eyed girl had grown into a comely maiden, and she on her side very much preferred Alan to any of the suitors whose fathers proposed to her

46 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

father for her hand. Perhaps William Grindecobbe understood how matters stood with his little maid's heart, for he did not press her to marry against her will, saying that there was yet plenty of time and he could not yet part with her ; and there was an understanding between her and Alan that if her father did not command her on her obedience to wed elsewhere, she would wait for him. Alan did not of course dare to propose anything like an open betrothal, since he had no prospect at present of supporting a wife ; but he hoped that Grindecobbe knew how matters stood, more especially since the master had only laughed when he found his daughter reading a valentine in which Alan told her, with great originality, that his heart was scorched in the fire of her eyes, and imprisoned in the silken locks of her hair.

He had left St Albans less willingly than usual by reason of these same silken locks, but change of air and scene soon raised his spirits. The sun was bright, his love was kind and faithful, and who knew what chances life might hold for them ? Meantime, life apart from Maudlen was more exciting than ever before ; for there was a stir in all men's minds, and Alan knew that the bondsmen of Herts and Essex and Kent said that the time was come to end or mend their troubles.

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 47

John Ball lay in Archbishop Simon's prison at Maidstone; but he contrived still to send letters round the country, which were learnt by heart and repeated from mouth to mouth among the Essex towns and villages. They were signed by some feigned name, not always alike, and were carried about by the Grey Friars and others. Alan himself sometimes carried a packet under his belt.

This year when Peter Piper and Alan reached Stratford, they heard a friar preaching at the market-place, ostensibly on the imprisonment of the Baptist; really on that of John Ball. "Now," said he, "lies John in his dungeon, the dungeon of Machere we call it, for speaking the truth to the great of the earth, and forbidding King Herod and his lords and bishops to oppress his poor brethren. Do violence to no man, said Blessed John, and he that hath two coats, give one to him that hath none; but did King Herod so? I trow not. For those days were like these," and he repeated a verse of John Ball's, all his hearers joining in with him:

"Now reigneth pride in price,
Covetise is holden wise,
Luxury withouten shame,
Gluttony withouten blame;
Envy reigneth with treason
And sloth is taken in great season;
God do bote, for now is time!"

48 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

"Good folk, shall we leave the holy Baptist to be done to death by King Herod, or maybe by his archbishop or his uncle, or shall we do our best to deliver him? Nay, here be a message from himself in his prison of Maidstone—I would say Machere—which runneth thus :

"John—Baptist—greeteth you well,
And doth you to wit, he hath rung your bell.
Now right and might, and skill and will,
God speed every deal !"

Then the friar ended, and the people dispersed, shouting "St George for merry England !"

That spring the men went out to the nearest butts in the long evenings, and practised regularly with their bows ; and when Alan's master was engaged in drawing teeth or taking horoscopes—for he added astrology to his other pursuits—Alan was sometimes invited to try his skill at the butts. If the Essex men met a new acquaintance in those days, one said softly, "The mill doth grind small, small" ; and the other, if he were in their secret, answered "The King's Son of Heaven, He shall pay for all." Much talk, wise and foolish, went on while men waited their turn at the butts. Every man would have a bow, if he had no other weapon, and the old bows were brought out which had done service at Crecy, and had hung unused in

the chimney ever since till their colour was "ruddy as old ivory." But the bowyers might work as hard as they would, they could not make bows for all applicants, and some had to content themselves with old rusty axes and iron-tipped stakes.

One evening Alan had gone to the butts near Chelmsford with a lad of his acquaintance, and as the people cheered him for putting his arrow thrice into the bull's eye, two men from the crowd signed to him to come aside with them. One was a red-haired man with a thin face and wild light eyes; the other was a more cultivated and much saner-looking person, with a dark bushy beard.

"Knowest thou Jack Miller?" said the red-haired man.

"He hath ground small, small," said Alan.

"And who shall pay for the grinding?" said the bearded person.

"The King's Son of Heaven," replied Alan.

"Thy name?"

"Alan Leech, prentice to Master Piper, the travelling 'pothecary from St Albans."

"Alan Leech, thou hast a good eye and a ready hand," said John Kirkby, the bearded man. "Is thy heart with us?"

"How should it not be? Was it not my father, Will Harding, that Rickdon of Crix did to death?"

D

50 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

"Then thou wilt fight for St George and the people?" said the red-haired man. "We need good shots and clear heads under our banner."

"Were I free," said Alan, "I would join this moment. But I am not my own man; my duty is to my master, whose bound prentice I am."

"Bound prentice? what irks thee of that? The time is come to burst all bonds," said Jack Straw, he of the red hair and wild eyes. "Little mettle hast thou to be held by the bond of prentice!"

"Nay, nay, Jack, the lad is honest and dutiful, and I like him the better that he is loyal to his master," said John Kirkby kindly, and putting his hand on Alan's shoulder he drew him aside from the butts and talked with him alone.

"Thou and I are alike," said John Kirkby. "Both thy father and mine have been done to death by the hand of the law."

"Was thine a bondsman then?"

"Nay, mine was a Hampton merchant. The country rang with the name of John Kirkby but a year or two back. Heardst thou never of the murder of Nicolini?"

"The merchant of Genoa that was to have made Hampton the greatest port in England and sold pepper at fourpence a pound?"

"Aye, the same. He was foully stabbed—one

of his own people had a grudge against him ; but because my father had been angry at his coming, and said he would take away the trade out of the mouths of honest English folk, and because old Gaunt would find someone to punish, the lawyers made it seem that my father had slain him, and hanged him for a murderer. Then I made a vow that I would never rest till that was bettered, and things made so that a man should have a fair chance for his life, without the lawyers thrusting in their fingers into the pie, and stirring up the devil's brew."

As they talked, more and more men came into the glade of the wood, and before long Jack Straw, mounted on a fallen tree, began to speak to them in a shrill, thin, excited voice, which every now and then went up into a scream.

There were among the leaders of the Essex rebellion a large Socialist and a small Anarchist contingent, though such names were as yet unknown. Kirkby was the leader of the Socialists, Jack Straw of the Anarchists. John Ball was essentially Socialist, and John Kirkby and Thomas Scott were in sympathy with him ; but Straw and his lieutenant, Robert Starling, with their special followers, were not Ball's men. These two came from the Essex marshes between the Crouch and the

52 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

Thames, and the ague of the marshes, as some said, had given a twist to their brains : for Straw was never quite sane, and Starling died mad before the summer was out. They were of those wild half-crazed beings who often come to the fore in times of civil commotion, and upset all the plans of wiser men. Nevertheless, there was a kind of fierce inspiration in Straw's speech which set Alan's heart beating wildly : for was he not after all the son of the murdered Harding ? He was followed by John Kirkby, who spoke in a much milder and more reasonable manner. The one wanted to destroy all that differentiated one man's station from another, if needs were by the death of him who held it ; the other wanted to redistribute the goods of earth more fairly, but with no violence. One object was more amiable than the other, but hardly more practicable.

When Alan went back to his master, he had pledged his word to John Kirkby that if at any time he should be free, he would come to Colchester to enquire for him at Thomas Scott's. For, as Kirkby pointed out, it was likely enough that when the whole country had risen, men would not be able to travel over-freely on the roads for a time, and business would be at a standstill ; then, if Piper should not care to keep his prentice through

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 53

the troubles, Alan was to join him, with a token and a watchword which Alan imprinted upon his memory.

The time of freedom for Alan was brought about in another way. As he and his master travelled the road from Chelmsford to Witham, they came to a tavern at Boreham where they found a man called Lynham, whose profession was to tramp up and down the roads begging, giving himself out to have been a prisoner among the Moors of Barbary, who, he said, had cut out his tongue because he would not deny the faith and worship Mahound. Lynham's travelling companion and spokesman told his story, while Lynham pointed piteously to his mouth, and held up something brown and leathery in a silver setting, which was declared to be the lost tongue. It brought the two knaves plenty of alms from tender-hearted women, who have seldom been able to resist the argument, "There it stands unto this day, to witness if I lie." Piper, however, being unwarily passed the tongue to handle, said it was no human tongue at all, but a bit of dressed leather from a sheep's back; and it was then discovered that Lynham had a very effective tongue of his own. The market people who were at the tavern, furious at being taken in, whipped the rogues out of the place and some way along the road;

54 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

and Alan and Piper went on their way, laughing at the knaves' bold-faced impudence. It proved, however, to be no laughing matter. When they had finished their stay at Witham and Kelvedon, and were nearing Colchester, four men, with Lynham among them, sprang upon them from out of the covert of the road, and knocked them both senseless with clubs. Alan revived before very long, and sat up, sick and dizzy, to find his master lying beside him, apparently dead, and horse and saddle-bags gone. It was reported later on that Lynham had set up in business as leech with their contents, and in all probability poisoned most of his patients.

Alan was too dazed and stupid to act, and hardly knew what had happened: but at this moment three churchmen came along the road, who had been travelling together for safety. One was a certain Master Strong, a Poor Preacher whom Wiclif had sent to the country near Colchester: one was Friar Appleton, and the other was Raymond himself, who was on his way to St Albans to try to get that year's great tithe reduced because of the poverty of his people. Raymond and Strong had been holding a learned disputation, as they walked, on Ockham's doctrine of Universals, and Appleton had trudged behind in silence, know-

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 55

ing nothing of philosophy : but when it appeared that a work of charity was to hand, the worthy friar showed himself so strong and capable that he reduced the others to humiliated obedience to his behests. He knew the neighbourhood, and borrowed a cart and a man to carry Piper to the hospital at Colchester : and not only so, but he begged so eloquently for the needs of the injured pair as he went along, that when they had taken poor Piper to the hospital and left him there to be nursed, he handed over to Alan enough to keep him for a week or so. Good Raymond, who could hardly have begged to save his life, had wedded Poverty so straitly that he had only twopence in his pocket, to keep him for a thirty mile trudge to St Albans.

The poor old apothecary was so much battered that he died without recovering consciousness, and Alan laid him in the grave, and stood beside it in the churchyard, doubtful what he ought to do next. About half of his seven years' apprenticeship had run out : his apprenticeship had been to Peter, not to Thomas, and Thomas had lately grumbled at having Alan in his shop, so that he could not have his own son regularly indentured as prentice. He could have gone back to Grindecobbe and put himself at his disposal, but it was a good walk to take

56 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

penniless, even going across country, and—Alan did not want to give up his sudden and unexpected freedom, especially just now when the country was about to rise and claim its rights, and the millennium was to begin on earth.

Just as he turned to leave the churchyard, John Kirkby, with his bushy beard, met him.

"Ah—the leech's prentice that would not leave his master? Hast thou coaxed the good man to set thee free?"

"Death hath set me free," said Alan with a gesture towards the new-made grave.

"And hast thou still a mind to join the bands of St George?"

"I have the mind," said Alan: "but I lost all I had when the knaves of the road gave my good master his death wound, and I have neither money nor food to bring with me—though as for food, maybe my mother at Faulkbourn would give me something, for kindness to the cause."

"Wilt thou work for us till the hour comes?"

"Ay, that will I and welcome. What can I do?"

"Here be two groats for thy keep. Go to thy mother at Faulkbourn and tell every man of those villages that St George is to wake from sleep on the night of the next full moon: and that the band from every village is to make its way, by the time

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 57

the moon is a quarter up in the sky, to the London road, and wait there for orders. Then we march up in force and meet other bands outside the City of London at Mile End. Ay, and bid each band bring a banner of St George to fly before them, that all may know their own band."

"And when we reach London, what then?" said Alan, his eyes bright and his face glowing.

"Then we shall pray the King to give us back our rights and redress all our wrongs, and England shall be merry England once again. 'God do bote, for now is time!'"

"Amen," said Alan.

CHAPTER V

ALAN had thought his mother looking old and haggard when he saw her during Piper's stay at Witham : but when he made his way back to Faulkbourn and saw her again, he began to perceive that she was not only aged, but seriously unwell. She ate and slept little, and could scarcely stay still in one place, while yet she could hardly drag herself about. He had learnt enough doctoring to be aware that her symptoms were those of lung mischief, but a "waste" in those days was hopeless, both to doctors and patients. She could not sleep at night, and would come out to the outhouse where Alan slept on straw, and would discuss the rising, between her fits of coughing, with excited eagerness partly born of fever.

"I thank the blessed saints every day of my life," she said one night as she sat on an upturned basket in the doorway, while the moonlight fell upon her bent shoulders and white cap, "that my son has taken up the good cause and will avenge

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 59

his father's death upon his murderers, and save other poor men from such a fate."

Alan, who was not vindictive, suggested that the point of the rising was not to shed blood, but to obtain justice from the King.

"It cannot be done without bloodshed : think of their swords and lances and armour, and our folk's jerkins that can be thrust through at one blow ! Yet, Alan, there is one thing I would fain have thee promise. If ever thou meet a De Rivers in trouble, treat him not as an enemy but as a friend. The Dame hath been a good friend to me, and I should break my heart if one hair of her sons' heads were harmed by me or mine. When the day of the Lord shall come, and the mighty men go down before thy sword, I charge thee that thou spare all De Rivers that thou meetest."

Alan promised what she asked, rather with the desire to pacify her than with any notion that the bloodshed which she foresaw was likely to take place. Not that he had any objection to fighting : but it was a peaceable demonstration only which Kirkby had proposed to him, and he could not see why anyone should interfere with the bondsmen's peaceable march to London to gain their rights from the King.

His message was to interview every man in that

60 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

parish and two or three others, and bid them to meet in the London road, when the full moon was a quarter high, carrying with them a fortnight's provision, and a Banner of St George for each parish where such could be provided. Pernel Harding stood by her son's side one morning, with such a banner displayed.

"See!" she said, "here is a good linen pennon—indeed, it is the sheet I have been keeping by me for my shroud: and on it is St George in blue, and the dragon in red. Didst thou think I could work it so well, Alan? I trow I had almost forgot the art, which I used to ply before thou wert born!"

"But how didst thou get the pattern, mother?" said Alan, looking with admiration at the outlined saint, impaling the red dragon on his lance.

"I took it from a picture of Mother Fenn's, that her mistress gave her. The saint's legs be too short, I fear, because of the selvedge in their way, but none could deny it is St George. And when I am dead and laid in the grave, my boy will fight under the banner I have made him, and his mother's prayers will go with him to win him victory over his enemies! But never forget, Alan, about the De Rivers."

The provisions for her boy were a great interest to poor Pernel, as she crept about the house, attend-

ing to the smoking of the bacon and the baking of the oatmeal cakes he was to carry with him : and indeed it probably made her forget her ailments for the time. But when all the preparation was ready she flagged : and on the last afternoon she consented to lie upon her bed while Alan read to her from Master Wiclif's Gospel-book which Strong the Poor Preacher had given him at Colchester. The prophecies of the fall of Jerusalem seemed to bring exultation to the poor woman : her fever-stricken mind ran on scenes of bloodshed and judgment rather than of peace and comfort. At last, however, she interrupted Alan and said, "Read no more, dear lad. Let me look at thee as I lie : for I doubt I shall never live to see thee again, after moon-rise to-night."

Then they were silent, and Alan had much ado to keep the tears out of his eyes.

The sky turned from deep blue to gold, and Pernel rose feebly, saying, "Nay, who but I should see to my lad's supper," and crept, holding by the wall, about the house, and set his basin and trencher, and watched him eat, which he only did by putting a strong force upon himself. The sky turned from gold to ruddy orange, and the dusk fell, and the moon came up, round and full and yellow, between the hedgerow trees : and then Alan

62 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

rose from the table and knelt down at his mother's knee for her blessing.

"The Lord bless my boy," she said, "and strengthen his arm to smite the oppressor, and give him mercy in his heart to them who repent of their sins, and courage to dare all things for his brethren!"

Then they kissed in silence, and she helped him strap his wallet upon his back and he took his bow in his hand, and the furled banner of St George, and went forth without looking back, for the moon sent her shafts across eyes that were purblind with the mist of tears, and could see nothing.

Life, however, holds many and various sensations, and Alan's eyes cleared when other men waited for him, or overtook him, on the same errand. They cut over the moor near Blount's Hall to the London road, avoiding Witham town: they waited, not on the road, but behind the hedges, till the Faulkbourn and Notley men had all collected there: and not long after, the Wickham Bishops men came down from their hill, and the leader came up to Alan and said, "Jack Miller hath ground small, small," and Alan returned the password, and they joined together and marched along the moonlit road towards Chelmsford, where John Kirkby and Alan Threader were waiting. A

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 63

little further they heard the sound of voices singing behind them, and waited: and up came the men from Maldon and the villages round, a strong company: and so the bands of St George tramped on, like a snowball, ever increasing in number as they marched. The song that they sang was always the same—it began:

“ Ill hath been man’s master long,
One will pay whose arm is strong:”

and all shouted the burden in chorus, though hardly perhaps in harmony,

“ When Adam delved and Eva span,
Where was then the gentleman?”

Alan, when he started on the march to London, knew very little more of the inner politics of the rising than the rank and file of the followers of the Banner of St George. It was only by degrees that he heard that not only the Essex men were in the movement, but Suffolk and Norfolk and Herts also: and how, at first, the Kentishmen had refused to join, since they had no bondage to their lords, being free yeomen, but had at last risen on account of the levying of the poll-tax, and of the insult offered to the daughter of Walter Hillyar, better known as Wat Tiler, by the sheriff’s officer. “ But now,” said his informant, “ all Kent is up, and is marching upon Blackheath, and hath

64 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

sworn to get John Ball out of his prison at Maidstone, if every gentleman in the shire stands round with his sword drawn to guard him."

"And where be Jack Straw and his marshmen?" said the man on Alan's left. "Be they gone on before, or behind?"

"They meet us at Mile End, coming up along the road from Tilbury to London, and some in boats up the river."

"Nay, gossip, they that come up in boats to London join the Kentishmen at Blackheath."

"'Tis better that Straw should betake himself to the Kentishmen than to us. I doubt he will stir up bloodshed before he need—a fierce, heady fellow he is, with a scrannel voice, ever speaking of vengeance rather than of justice."

"There is vengeance due to the oppressors, comrade. Why, this lad here"—pointing to Alan—"hath seen his father done to death by Rickdon of Crix, and the lawyers bring it in the visitation of God."

"Aye," said Alan, "but though Rickdon of Crix deserve death, and the lawyers may well be hanged and none be the worse, yet if we can get the people's rights, we may well spare to hang anyone."

"Nay, nay, the lawyers need a short shrift and a tight halter. See how they ever play into the lords'

hands, and when a plain man pleads his rights, how they bring up a Latin book or an old parchment writ with faded ink that none but they can read! The lords may go free if they will loose our bonds, but the lawyers shall hang!"

"Master Ball will have no bloodshed. He saith it is the will of God that all men should be equal in freedom, and no lords, and no villains: and that if all England demands this of the King, the King must give in to us."

"But we be not going to demand that there should be no more lords. We be going to demand that our bonds be loosed, and the lords may abide lords if they will do that," said a practical shrewd-faced man, who saw no visions of a millennium. These Essex peasants, with all their enthusiasm, had the hard common-sense of Englishmen, not the hysterical aspirations which across the sea culminated four hundred years later in the Reign of Terror, and there was a general murmur of agreement with Giles Thatcher's words.

At Chelmsford, which they reached while the moon was still high, John Kirkby and Alan Threader met them with other bands of St George which had assembled there. Here the people of Chelmsford brought out ale to refresh them, and while some took leave of their friends before joining the bands,

66 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

others of the townsmen asked what the plan of operations was to be. "Thou hast a ready tongue, Alan Leech: speak, lad!" said two or three, for Alan's better education had already given him something of a power among his peasant friends.

"We go, master," said Alan, "to pray the King to do justice against the lords who hold us in bondage."

"But why go armed to offer a humble and peaceful petition?" said a townsman timorously.

"Because, master, we have no mind to be stopped by the lords before we can reach the King," said Alan.

By moonset they had made several miles further, and were bidden to lie down and rest till the sun was up: and each man lay down on the road where he was, with his head upon his wallet, and slept till day. And then the sun rose upon the first day of the rising, known afterwards and for many generations, as the Hurling-time, perhaps to be rendered into modern English more correctly as the Whirling-time.

At Chelmsford John Kirkby came across Alan, and made him walk with him instead of with the men of Faulkbourn as at first. Alan's rough medical knowledge made him valuable in a crowd where the learned professions, including medicine,

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 67

were for the most part absent : and possibly John Kirkby, like many other people, had taken a liking for the bright-eyed, sunny-faced youth, whose open-air summers of travel on foot had made him tireless in frame, and physically hard as nails. At mid-day Alan met with his first adventure, which proved to be of more importance to him than he thought at the time.

The June sun beat down hotly upon the marching throng behind John Kirkby, who was near the front : and when a tavern with pole and green leaves appeared by the roadside, the pace of the Hatfield Peverel men, who were leading the way, quickened remarkably in their desire to get hold of the ale before it was drunk by others. Kirkby saw the movement, and said, " Devil take the hindmost will never do for us. Run, good Alan, and tell them it is my order that no man shall be served till I come, but all shall drink together fair and square so long as the ale holds out." Alan ran to obey Kirkby's orders, but by the time he reached the tavern he found that a fray had begun. A young squire on a good bay horse, scarlet-cloaked and scarlet-plumed, and his two men-at-arms, were defending themselves against the Hatfield men, who were thirty against three : and the device upon the horse's caparisons was no other than the De Rivers arms. Young De

68 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

Rivers had already disabled two of his assailants, but the rest were all the more angry, and would probably have finished him before the main body came up, had not Alan cried with all the power of his lungs, "Quit, quit, men of Hatfield ! I come with Kirkby's commands. Leave the gentleman alone ! and you, sir, if you will yield honourably to me, I pledge my life no harm shall come to you !" Then swinging himself upon the horse's crupper, he said in the young man's ear, "Yield to me, sir, and you shall be dealt with knightly. It is your only chance. These fellows have not learnt the laws of war."

"I yield," said Hugh De Rivers, much against the grain : and he handed his sword to Alan.

"My masters," cried Alan, "he has yielded his sword, he is my prisoner. Give over fighting : know you not that none may touch a prisoner without foul shame ?" The crowd fell back, all but two men, who appeared to demur, and Alan leapt down. "Hal Grimston and Jack Eves," he said, "lead you each the horse of one of these knaves, and I will lead this gentleman's myself, and convey him to John Kirkby."

Grimston and Eves being thus engaged, the party of assault had no ring-leader, and Alan was conducting his prisoner to the place where he had left Kirkby when he was stopped by a man called Jacob

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 69

Darrell, who perhaps was not loath to interfere with one to whom John Kirkby showed such obvious favour.

"Let us through," said Alan. "The gentleman is my prisoner, and I take him to Master Kirkby to know his will respecting him."

"Be thou to take and hold prisoners, young man? Not so: if he be a prisoner he is not for thee but for all of us. We may get a good ransom for him."

"He yielded himself to me," said Alan, "and the ransom is my matter."

"He has drawn the first blood of the bands of St George," said Darrell, "and his kind have long enough shed our blood and we had no vengeance." He laid his hand upon the horse's bridle and made as if he would have pulled Hugh de Rivers down, but Alan drew the sword of his prisoner and said, "None shall touch him but that he deals with me first; my honour is pledged for his safety."

Darrell drew back when he saw the drawn sword, grumbling that no good would come of prentice lads who aped the ways of knights and lords, but Hugh de Rivers, who had not yet spoken, and who sat his horse sad and ashamed at having been defeated by churls, now lifted up his head.

"Master," he said, "I know not who you may be, but I thank you for your knightly defence."

70 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

John Kirkby was reached at last, and Alan told his story, claiming De Rivers as his prisoner by the laws of war. Kirkby was somewhat doubtful how best to act: the bands of St George professed to have no quarrel with any but the lords, and it might be unwise to begin their career by taking a prisoner, while yet it would not do to offend the people. All unconsciously, Alan came to his rescue in the difficulty: his own mind had been made up from the first.

"Master Kirkby," he said, "is not this prisoner mine by the laws of war to do what I will by him—keep him or put him to ransom, or let him go? It is to me that he yielded himself. Is it not so, sir?"

"It is," said De Rivers.

"The laws of war," said Darrell, "be made for lords, and not for men like us, who deem all should be equal, share and share alike."

"Nay, nay," said John Kirkby, "that may come anon, but all be not equal as yet. If Alan Leech have taken the gentleman prisoner let us hear what he would fain do with him."

"Master Kirkby," said Alan, "I would fain let him go free, with a safe conduct from you, if you will give it him. For you, sir, you are De Rivers of Faulkbourn?"

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 71

"Hugh De Rivers of Faulkbourn am I," said the young man.

"Then if it be for me to do with you as I will, I bid you go free without ransom, for the sake of the kindness your mother the Dame hath shown to mine, Pernel Harding, the widow of Will Harding whom Rickdon of Crix did to death. Shall we avenge unkindness and not pay back a kind deed when it is in our power?"

The flame of generous feeling which shone in Alan's eager eyes caught his hearers' hearts. There was a murmur of applause, and when Alan restored Hugh de Rivers his sword, and Kirkby gave him a safe conduct and he turned his horse's head to ride away, those who had been ready to shed his blood cheered him with all their lungs. "Master," he said to Alan, "if ever the time comes that I or mine can repay you your good office, my goodwill is yours till my dying day." And when he was gone, the people cheered Alan in his place, and the lad became the hero of the day, and perhaps never in the years to come knew a sweeter or more gladdening popularity, or a greater contentment with himself than he felt for upholding the honour of the bands of St George, and proving that one could act knightly without being a knight.

CHAPTER VI

THE Essexmen marched up through the long June day, in surprising order for undisciplined labouring men, keeping to the high road and doing little damage. When they came to the towns, the gates were opened to them, and food and drink were brought to them, for the towns recognised that they were fighting the same battle as themselves. Their chief leaders, besides John Kirkby, were Thomas Scott and a Bury St Edmunds priest called Wraw, who marched beside the great pennon of St George which led the way, and represented the whole body ; and they, as well as their followers, belonged to the law-abiding part of the rising, kept strict order, and would allow no stragglers to rejoin their ranks. Between Romford and Stratford they had their first brush with the authorities. A company of the lords' commissioners, who had heard by a swift messenger of the rising, rode down from London to disperse the bands : but the scouts in front told that they

were drawn up across the road, and Kirkby ordered a company of bowmen to march in the van, and when they came in sight of the company, to draw up in double ranks as was the custom with archers. Simon Rolfe, a master bowman who had fought in the French wars, was their captain, and bade them string their bows and shoot if Kirkby gave the order. A messenger came from the glittering cluster of armed men in front, crying, "Ho, masters all! what means this insolence? In the King's name, turn round before the day is an hour older, and make your way home, and by the mercy of the King it may be that you may escape punishment this time!"

"Nay," said John Kirkby, "we turn not round till we have seen the King himself, and besought him to redress the wrongs of his loyal lieges. Move out of our road, my lords and gentlemen, lest it be the worse for you."

The messenger went back, the gentlemen put their horses in line, drew their swords, and galloped to the charge; but before they could get near enough to use their swords, they were received with a volley of arrows, and drew off again quicker than they came on. Then they consulted together, gave orders, and rode back to London as fast

74 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

as they could, while the bands of St George sang,

“When Adam delved and Eva span,”

more exultingly than ever.

They were not further interfered with on the road, and at the end of the second day they were all encamping at Mile End, whither the Shoreditch roughs came out and tried to fraternise with them, talking of sacking London, and a goodly spoil to be had there. Kirkby would have nothing to do with these gentry, and early the next morning he called to Alan, saying that he had a message for him to take across the river to Blackheath, where the Kentishmen and Straw with his marshmen were encamped.

“Take paper and inkhorn in case they should desire to send a written answer,” said Kirkby, “but for the message, I will trust thee with it by word of mouth. Tell them the sooner we move to our work the better, for I have not brought up my Essexmen here to be turned into thieves, and there are too many outlaws here to please me. Thou knowest well enough—thou hast seen and heard the scum of the earth that do all they can to mix with our good orderly fellows, and debase their thoughts.”

He gave Alan a token to show to Straw, and

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 75

for a companion, one Roger Brown, who was to ride behind him on a raw-boned grey carthorse, and the two started upon their journey. They rode through the fair green fields of Stepney to the little waterside village of Shadwell, whence there was a horse-ferry over the river to Wapping in Kent; and thence they rode on through Deptford and Greenwich to Blackheath, which was as thick with men as a beehive when the bees swarm. The camp here was far less orderly than Kirkby's at Mile End, and the march of the Kentishmen had been much more eventful than his. The Kentishmen had no lords, being usually free yeomen, so that their object in joining the rising was not to be released from their bondage, but to protest against the obnoxious poll-tax; they had marched upon Maidstone, setting John Ball free, and hanging all the lawyers they could get hold of. Their destructiveness had, however, been limited to this obnoxious class, and to all law papers and parchments which they could seize, which they burnt with great joy as a sort of mysterious wizardry which was always liable to disturb a man's possession of his own property: but though they paid domiciliary visits to the gentlemen who lived near their road, it was only to call on them to join them, and if instead

76 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

of service they were given a side of bacon or a sack of corn, they were satisfied. Their politics were perhaps more theoretical than practical. They enforced an oath on every one they met, whether gentleman, priest, or Canterbury pilgrim, to the effect that they would never acknowledge any king called John. As King Richard was upon the throne, this seemed somewhat needless; but it was in this way that they expressed their hatred of the Duke of Lancaster, John of Gaunt, to whom they probably attributed much of the evil that clung round the legendary remembrance of his royal namesake.

Alan passed through the part of the heath tenanted by the Kentishmen, and found that John Ball was preaching in the open air to as many as his voice could reach, and Wat Tiler, his lieutenant Ralph Rudge, and Jack Straw with his two underlings Robert Starling and Tom Baker of Fobbing, had gone to hear the sermon. Alan and his comrade put up their horse and went to the preaching also. John Ball looked much older and more haggard than when Alan had heard him preach on the Cheping Hill at Witham: his shoulders were bowed, and his hair was grey, but his eyes still blazed, and his voice had its old ring when he grew excited with his subject, as if

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 77

he had not lain for years a prisoner in Maidstone jail. He had taken for his text, "When Adam delved and Eva span."

"My masters," he was saying, "God hath made the world good, but men have made it evil, and now is time that it shall be brought back to that state whereto it was first made. All men be created equal, but man hath brought in serfdom against God's blessed will by their unjust oppression of their neighbours, the weaker by the stronger: whereas if God had pleased to create some serfs and some lords, He would have put a mark upon them at their birth. But now who can tell at sight of a new-born babe whether he be lord or bondsman? Wherefore this present time is none other than the day of salvation, when all shall be brought back to that which the Lord intended in the hour when He called all very good. Before us lies the fair field of England, but the crops which God hath sown be sorely hindered from growing by the devil's weeds, and we have to mow down these weeds, that there may be among us equal freedom, equal nobility, equal dignity, equal power."

Jack Straw, who was standing in front of Alan, nodded his red head with great approval at these remarks, but when John Ball went on to say that

78 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

the worst weeds were not the lords and the lawyers, but the seven deadly sins, and ended with a moral exhortation, he turned aside impatiently and began to talk to Ralph Rudge, who was nearest to him. But Alan, with boyish enthusiasm, felt his soul moved when Ball said, "Good friends, let us guard ourselves from Wrath and Envy and Covetise, and the rest of that evil brotherhood, who always attend, be sure, where men meet together even to do the work of God ; and let us follow the seven fair sisters who serve Truth in her fair palace, whither, as saith Piers, no man may enter who is not of their kin."

"Straw be moving off," said Roger Brown nudging Alan : "were it not well to follow him and deal with our message?" and Alan came back to earth. They overtook Straw and gave him Kirkby's communication, and the marshmen offered them a jack of ale and some bread and cheese for refreshment, Jack Straw sitting and eating with them.

"Sure," said Roger Brown, as they discussed the sermon, "England should be a merry land were John Ball made Archbishop."

"Archbishop me no archbishops," said Straw, "neither John Ball nor any other. Set a beggar on horseback and he will ride to the devil. Down

with all who claim greatness over other men, say I."

"But sure, master," said Roger Brown, "there must be some higher and some lower in Holy Church, and we need that the best priests should fill the best places."

"There be no mortal man," said Straw, "but if he is once set over his fellows he will be lord and make them bondsmen. For me, I would do away with all bishops and parsons and abbots and monks, and be served by none but the Grey Friars, who come of our own folk, and have for gear nothing but that that is given them for charity."

"Aye," said another of the marshmen, "they might be made priests, and range the country to marry and bury and christen, and put up masses for the dead, and by times a rousing sermon for them who list such matters."

The result of the negotiation between Mile End and Blackheath was that, next day, a body chosen from the two bands set off to go together to the City, to ask at the Guildhall for the peace and friendship of the citizens, and for their good offices to get them speech of the King. They met outside Aldgate, and fifty were admitted through the gate and marched up towards the Guildhall. But the Essexmen were not altogether pleased with the

80 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

demeanour of the Kentishmen : the former took much pride in their sober and orderly discipline, which, as they said, ought to convince all men that they were not highwaymen or outlaws, but the King's loyal lieges : but the men of Kent talked of going home with more gold and silver in their pouches than they brought, half in earnest, half in boyish desire of producing a sensation among the fat citizens. When the delegates came into Guild-hall, they were treated by the Corporation with great civility, and the young and enthusiastic like Alan imagined that the aldermen were altogether in sympathy with the rising ; but when some of them promised so readily to bespeak the bands of St George an interview with the King, if they on their side would promise to return home immediately that they obtained what they desired, it was due chiefly to their dread of a general rising in the City itself, helped by the prentices, who were always ready for a riot.

Kirkby replied with great gravity that they would certainly return home as soon as they had what they desired : but Ralph Rudge the Kentishman spoilt the effect of this answer by chiming in with a hoarse laugh, " Ay, your worships, when we have got what we *desire*," with so meaning an emphasis that the aldermen looked uneasy. The

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 81

Mayor and some of the aldermen were against doing anything to help the rising, and they might have had their way had not a crowd of roughs (prentices and others) assembled outside the Guildhall, and shouted that unless the City gates were opened to St George, the Guildhall should be wrecked and the new glass windows broken. Finally they temporised, and promised that if the bands would go peaceably to their camps, the King's answer to their request should be forwarded as soon as it was received.

Nothing happened, however, during the rest of that day, and early next morning Alan was summoned by John Kirkby, with two or three others who were skilful with their pens, to take copies of a new letter which had arrived in the Mile End camp from John Ball, so that it might be read to and learnt up by all the bands. It was addressed to Kirkby, though his name was not given, lest the document should give rise to an accusation against him. It ran thus :—

“John, Chepe St Mary priest of York, and now of Colchester, greeteth well John Nameless, and John Miller, and John Carter, and biddeth them beware of guile in Borough, and stand together in God's name, and biddeth Piers Ploughman go to his work, and chastise well Hob the robber, and

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82 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

take with you John Trueman and all his fellows
and no more.

“John the Miller hath ground small, small :
The King's Son of Heaven shall pay for all.
Beware or ye be woe,
Know your friend from your foe,
Have enough and say Ho !
Do well, flee sin,
Seek peace and hold you therein,
And so he biddeth John Trueman and all his fellows.”

The allegorical style of writing, however, has its drawbacks ; Alan, who had long been used to John Ball's verses, understood well enough that this was a warning not to mar the good cause by violence and robbery, and not to be led on by the knaves in the Borough to use their strength for unlawful ends. But some, he found, thought Hob the robber meant the lords who were to be chastised for their tyranny, so that Ball's good advice hardly had all the effect intended.

In the morning, word came from the Guildhall that the Essexmen and Kentishmen should march into the Borough, and wait there for the King to speak with them that very afternoon. Wraw, the Bury priest, stood beside the great pennon of St George and put up a prayer before the march began, and the bands stood round with bared heads and repeated the Paternoster with him. Then the

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 83

Essex contingent, by leave of the Lord Mayor, passed through the outskirts of the city and over London Bridge into Southwark, whither the Kentish contingent had come up from Blackheath : and there they took up their post on the bank of the Thames, and waited all day for the King to come. The sun beat down upon them through the June afternoon, and from time to time, when the Tower watergate opened, a rumour went round that the King was coming at last : but no King came. Impatient and weary, they waited there till sunset, and at last, sick with disappointment, they heard Kirkby give the order to fall back into the fields just beyond the marshes at Rotherhithe, and sleep there till daybreak. Alan lay down with a sense of disenchantment and an uncertain suspicion which he tried in vain to dismiss. Could it be that the King would play them false after all ?

CHAPTER VII

WHEN Alan Leech was an old man, and told the story of the Hurling-time to his grandchildren, he always said, "If only the King had come out to us that first day, or even the second, the rising would have been very different from what it came to be." For five days the bands of St George—for most of the Mile-End bands had now crossed the Thames—stood on the river-bank in the June sun, and each day they were told the King would certainly come that day, but no King came. Rumours flew from mouth to mouth, and no one knew whether to believe any or all of them.

"They say it is the Archbishop and the Lord Treasurer that keep the King from speaking with us."

"Caterham here hath heard a man say that they be a-going to spirit the King to France, that we may not speak with him."

"Aye, and they have called together the companies that fought in the French wars to let them

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 85

loose on our camps, and no quarter given or taken."

"That may be or not, but one thing I know; when my meal is done, and more than half is gone, I must steal or starve."

The full moon had waned to half, and it was June 12, the eve of Corpus Christi day. Whether the policy of the King's uncles was, as the bands of St George began to think, simply to keep them inactive and expectant till their provisions were gone, no one can now tell, but on June 12 the situation changed further. The men of Herts had risen too and had marched on Highbury, so that there were now bands encamped on three sides of London. When this news reached the King a messenger came post-haste to bid the bands attend on the bank at Rotherhithe, and the King would come that morning and speak with the bands from his barge.

Again Alan and his comrades stood upon the river bank, with the green marshes behind, and the grey water lapping slowly in front, as the tide ebbed and flowed. Again they waited through the hot June morning, when at noon a messenger came to say that the King would come at four in the afternoon. They dispersed into the Borough to get food and drink, and now the Kentishmen, who had with difficulty been held in order through

86 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

these long days, began to riot. Alan saw a crowd around the Marshalsea, crying out that if any good men and true were there in jail who had a mind to join the good cause, they should be set free. When he came up, they had battered the prison doors in with a great beam, and were bringing out the prisoners, asking each in turn if he were minded to strike a stroke for St George and merry England. None said nay to this, and weapons were thrust into their hands, with which they vanished in the buzzing and surging crowd ; but whether they fought, or whether they contented themselves with sacking the Southwark shops, Alan never knew.

Alan went back to the river-bank, but the King did not start from the Tower till the sun had westered, and was beginning to shed down soft misty rays between the crowd on the shore and the peaked roofs of the city opposite. Then Alan saw, issuing from the Watergate at the Tower, a gorgeous vessel—so gorgeous that it reminded him of the ship in the ballad :

Her sails were made of satin,
Her ropes of silken twine,
Her high mast was of ivory,
Her rudder of gold most fine,

and the boy-king who stood up in it, with his

red velvet cloak, and the red cap upon his golden hair, looked fit to be the fairy prince himself. There, behind him in the barge were his ministers, Archbishop Simon of Sudbury in his square velvet cap and silken gown, and the Lord Treasurer in his black armour as Prior of the Knights of Rhodes, and his hard grim face; and the man next to Alan said, "An angel and two devils," for all hated the King's ministers as if they had been devils indeed.

However, as the barge neared the shore, and King Richard, in his boyish beauty with the sun shining on his hair, bowed to his people with royal grace, a great cheer arose from all that crowded Rotherhithe bank; and when it ceased one of his knights cried out loud and clear, "Ho, good folk, His Grace the King craves to know what meaneth this concourse? If there be any petition that ye desire to make, let one row up to the King's barge and deliver it into his hand."

Petitions had long been prepared and ready, but it had been hoped that the King would land upon the shore and hear his subjects' petition in person. Kirkby came forward, and after a low bow, sent his great voice across the water. "Will not the King graciously vouchsafe to land and listen to the petition of his poor lieges with his own ears?"

88 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

Alan saw the King turn round to the Treasurer and speak pleadingly to him : evidently he wished to comply with the people's desire, but was prevented. The Treasurer stood up and said, " Let him that brings the petition come out hither in a boat and present it himself ; the King will not land." Tiler, Straw, and Kirkby were standing together in the open space that had been prepared for the King ; they spoke together, and then Alan saw Straw hastily leave the others and make his way to that part of the bank where his own men were assembled, while Tiler with the Kentishmen's petition against the poll-tax, and Kirkby with the Essexmen's petition against bondage, stepped into a cockboat and were rowed to the King's barge, where one of the knights received the petitions and handed them to the King. He stood up, and his young voice sounded clear over the water, " Fair lieges, we will examine into your grievances—" when it broke off short. The Treasurer had given an order to the boatmen, and the barge began to move away swiftly to the other side. The King turned round angrily to the Treasurer and stamped his foot ; and then the crowd began to cry " Treason, treason ! Down with the Treasurer ! Down with him who would let the King from hearing us ! God save the King ! and down with his ministers !"

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 89

And then Alan, looking down the bank, saw that all the western part of it where the Kentishmen stood, was astir, and that Jack Straw's marshmen and the Kentishmen were making a rush for London Bridge. Tiler kept some of his men back, and took them to Blackheath, and Kirkby's Essexmen went back in fair order to Mile End, but Straw and his marshmen, with Rudge and some of the Kentishmen, rushed London Bridge, and encamped themselves upon Tower Hill, much to the alarm of the Court. As yet, however, there had been no plundering except in Southwark, with the exception of one Spanish wine-ship which lay at the wharf, which the Kentishmen looted and drank that same night.

Corpus day broke hot and bright, and the men at Mile End awoke full of expectation that this day, at least, would see something decisive done. Indeed, if anything were to be done at all, the wasting of their provisions made it needful that it should be done soon.

"Good news, Master Kirkby," said Alan, entering the leader's presence with his bright eyes full of delight. "Master Waddington of Chelmsford sends to offer us twenty sacks of wheaten meal, and as many of barley meal, from his granaries in the city, if we will convey it away, and that will

90 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

keep many men with us whose food is just giving out."

"How to get at it is the question," said Kirkby. "I have no mind to march my men into the City and let them loose there."

"Let me go with forty men, and each of us fetch a sack," said Alan, "and carry it on our shoulders, and others might wait for us outside the City walls to take our burdens when we get beyond the gates."

Provisions were becoming of such importance that Kirkby assented to Alan's proposal, and he and his forty men were admitted into the City, and went to the miller for his meal, but Waddington's sacks had already started at sunrise in a waggon which also contained certain valuables which he thought it safer to take out of London, and Alan's journey was in vain as far as they were concerned. When he came out of the granary, he found that though it might be easy to get into London it was wholly impossible to get back. The narrow streets were filling with ever-increasing crowds, all pouring one way: some were shouting "Down with the ministers" or "Down with all lords," others were chanting "When Adam delved and Eva span," or some verse of John Ball's. The bands of St George usually wore green leaves in their caps, but

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 91

many of the men who formed this crowd wore no badge of this kind, and from their low villainous countenances Alan put them down as belonging to the slums of Shoreditch and other similar places. All his forty men were in a moment absorbed in the crowd except Roger Brown; this man constituted himself a sort of body-guard to the young leech, who had set a dislocated bone for him which had threatened to make his left arm powerless for life, and earned his life-long gratitude.

Alan and Roger were swept along the narrow streets in the crowd, past St Paul's, and towards Ludgate. No one in the midst of a thick crowd has a chance of much personal adventure: Alan's arms were not free, but his height enabled him to see over the heads of a good many other men. The first thing that he saw was an unlucky Fleming being dragged out of a house, and held up on his own doorstep with threats of hanging because he and his took the bread out of honest English mouths by meddling with the wool trade. "If he be a Fleming," shouted a woman from the opposite window, "he cannot say bread and cheese! Show him a bit and ask him what he calls it!" and a bit of cheese and the crust of a loaf was tossed towards the Fleming and caught by his persecutors. "'Tis Brot and Kaus, or some such outlandish nonsense

92 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

in their mouths," said the crowd to one another. "Speak, Sirrah! what be these?" Happily the Fleming had been long enough in England to acquire a few English words, and he uttered "Bread and Cheese" triumphantly and began to eat it: the crowd roared with laughter and let him go. Some of his countrymen, however, were less fortunate, and a Flemish merchant named John Lyon was hung by the mob, though not in Alan's sight.

The crowd pressed on through Ludgate and out into the front of the Temple, where there was more room to move. By the time Alan and Roger got there, they had broken into the building, and were heaving out of the windows all kind of property from within—books, bits of parchment, and sometimes heavy rolls. A bonfire had been lit outside in which the rolls and parchment were smouldering, and some were inclined to think they were bewitched because they did not burn readily. As Alan was standing there, watching the books and rolls come tumbling through the broken windows, he saw a grimmer destruction than of books and rolls. A great beam was pushed out of a window overhead, and out on it they thrust five or six white-faced wretches, each with a noose round his neck, and hanged them from the beam in the sight of

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 93

the crowd one by one. They were lawyers who had hidden in the Temple.

"Know you who that second fellow is, coming out now?" said Roger. "'Tis Rickdon's devil as they used to call him, Joseph Ash, that did Will Harding to death."

"God have mercy on his soul!" said Alan, turning away sick and white from the sight of the death-struggles of his father's enemy.

"He did thee harm enough. Is not revenge sweet?"

"Sweet when a man hopes for it, not when he sees it," said Alan. "Come away out of this."

They went on till they came to the Savoy, the Duke of Lancaster's palace, where Jack Straw's marshmen appeared to be engaged in common plunder, for they were carrying off spoil, one a silken carpet, and another a golden candlestick, and Tom of Fobbing was standing by the gate looking on.

"Do you let your men sack the palace, and they St George's men with green leaves in their caps?" said Alan indignantly.

"Our men be no plunderers," said Tom of Fobbing, laughing at Alan's anger, "see, they carry the spoil to the river to throw it in."

He walked down the few hundred yards between

94 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

the palace gate and the river bank, and Alan and Roger followed. They saw that what he said was true ; the marshmen were destroying, not robbing. Every one who could get into the palace was carrying out his share of spoil and casting it into the Thames, and the greater splash it made in the water, the louder the cheers and laughter that followed.

"Seest thou, Alan Leech, we be no thieves," said Tom of Fobbing.

"Nay," said Alan, "but this seems to me but waste ; for if the gold were taken to the King's mint, there would be more in the land for the poor."

"Better still to learn them that gold is but dross."

"Aye," said another marshman, chiming in, "and better still to learn the lords of the land that 'tis not meet for them to sleep on down, and eat and drink their victuals from Spain and Italy, while Piers Plowman lies in his lord's dungeon, eating wormy bread and drinking filthy water till he rots to death."

Just at this moment there was a cry of "Fire the palace, fire the palace !" and Alan and Roger, following the crowd, made their way within the great gate, and saw that tongues of flame and

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 95

smoke-wreaths were already making their way out of some of the windows, whilst a pile of wood and straw was beginning to smoke against the great door to help on the conflagration. Then out of a side door came a scared boy led by a Grey Friar, at sight of whom there was a cry, "Hal of Bolingbroke, the wolf's cub!" but the friar cried, "The bands of St George war not on babes!" and the crowd opened to let him pass by into safety. This was Alan's future king, Henry IV.

Fuller of frolic than mischief, while the palace was burning, the mob found a new and delightful amusement for themselves. Someone found the Duke's jack-coat, a magnificent state garment of blue and green embroidery worked with stars, and a sparkling stone in the heart of each star, and this they set up for a target and shot at till it was riddled through and through with arrows, crying, "One for his heart! One for his back!" as if they had been schoolboys at play. When the jack-coat would scarcely hold together, they took a hammer and pounded the jewels into dust and threw the coat into the Thames. But in the midst of the play, one of the men was seen with a suspicious bulge in his garment, where he had hidden a gold cup, and he and the gold cup were thrown together into the roaring flames, among fierce execrations.

96 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

“Would he make St George’s bands thieves and robbers?”

Even among the marshmen, however, some were not incorruptible. Over thirty of them found their way into the cellar when the palace was burning, and swilled the Duke’s rich wine until they were stupid, and the palace walls fell and closed them into the vault, where they had the company of the wine, and that alone, through the long days during which they starved to death. Their voices were heard groaning and crying, but no one, in those unsympathetic days, troubled to release them from their fate.

Just at this time Alan and Roger found a chance of getting back to Mile End and Kirkby, by means of a wherry on the river which belonged to the Savoy, and which, with all the other property of the Duke, was masterless during the riot. He was perhaps quite as well out of the sights and sounds of violence, which became more and more evident in the City as the day wore on. Drink, as in later centuries, had proved the snare of the otherwise worthy and peaceable English peasant. The citizens who were either friendly or frightened opened their cellars, and treated the bands of St George to wine and beer; some had broken into wine taverns and alehouses, and were lying dead drunk in the gutters,

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 97

with the green leaves hardly yet faded in their caps. There was on the whole, however, very little bloodshed. The exceptions were at the Temple, and at St John's House, where some of the servants of the Knights of St John were slain ; and with these, as Alan afterwards heard, fell Sir Walter Rickdon. He and his men-at-arms had been called into St John's House for its defence, and when he saw, as he thought, signs that the assailants were giving way, he sallied forth to lay about him and finish their discomfiture. Some of the Hatfield men, however, recognising him, rushed upon him and got hold of him, and would have slain him then and there ; others were for taking him prisoner and dealing with him by law ; and while the two sides were debating the question Rickdon drew his sword and tried to cut his way out. But a blacksmith named Wardour seized him round the middle and dashed him down upon the ground with all his force ; and as he lay there, the surging crowd in its blind movements pressed forward and over him, and so trampled him to death. " Truly," said one of the Hatfield men, " it is with him as Pernel Harding foretold ; he who would show no mercy had no mercy shown to him in his last end."

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN Alan and Roger reached Mile End, they found that most of the Essexmen had come back from their excursion into London. Tiler's Kentishmen, who were less under discipline, were not as particular with regard to their return to Blackheath, and Jack Straw and his marshmen had now encamped regularly on Tower Hill: and there was some grumbling that night among those who felt that Kirkby kept them out of the fun. But next morning their tone changed. A messenger rode down from the Guildhall and demanded to speak with John Kirkby: and not long afterwards the whole camp knew that the King himself would that day ride out to Mile End, and inquire himself into the grievances of his faithful subjects.

"Now," said Alan, "all will be well. The King has got the better of his evil counsellors."

"Eh, I know not about that," said old Robin Porter. "We must beware of treachery. I doubt

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 99

the lords will find some means to take vengeance for yesterday's riots."

"The King's counsellors may be treacherous, not the King," said Alan. "Methought I never saw a boy more like an angel—not even with wings on in a mystery."

"My father, who was a King's guard," said old Porter, "used to say that never was there a Plantagenet but he could be angel or devil at pleasure—there was wicked King John, that had the heart of a devil, but could make himself angel, and there was good King Edward, who when he was crossed made himself devil at times."

"If King Richard be a devil," said Alan, "then devil and angel must change parts."

Alan's services as leech were required all that morning in letting blood from such members of the bands of St George as had exceeded the day before with the citizens' liquor, and he had not much time to hang heavy on his hands before the news came that the King was in sight.

Along the London road came first a cloud of dust, then flashes of armour glinting in the sun, and then horses with gay caparisons and knights with gay cloaks. "'Tis he—'tis the King!" flew round the camp as they beheld a white charger ridden by a boy in scarlet cloak and a white plume,

with a light gold circlet round his scarlet cap. The royal company rode into the camp, and then Kirkby, Threader, and Wraw the priest came out and stood talking to the King for several minutes. Then King Richard sat upright on his great horse, and cried aloud, "Good people, I am your King and Lord : what would you of me ?"

Then there arose a great clamour in the camp, each man crying something different. "Free us from our bonds ! Free our lands ! Bid the lords cease to hold us in bondage ! We will that no man be ever named or held to be a serf, but a free Englishman !" and over all "God save King Richard, our deliverer !"

Alan, who was practically John Kirkby's secretary, stood a little way behind his master as he spoke with the King, telling him of the grievances of the people : while the latter listened sympathetically, speaking now and then with a tongue as compassionate and winning as if he thoroughly grasped the hardship and injustice which had brought the bands of St George to London. One and another was called from the ranks by Kirkby and Threader to testify to the oppression which had made the people rise, and the King heard what each had to say, and gave promises in his boyish voice that "such things must have an end

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 101

hereafter." But Alan, as he watched the interview, was aware that the King's friendliness was not shared by the knights who accompanied him. "If some thousands of horses and oxen or other brute beasts had assembled round London to pray that their lives might be made easier for them, and that they should not be struck when they were doing their best," he said afterwards, "I doubt the knights would have looked on them much as they did on us, with scorn in their hearts which they dared not show for dread of our numbers."

When Kirkby and Wraw appealed to the multitude to speak if it was not true that the Essexmen had come to London only for relief from their bonds, and that if they were set free they would disperse and go home that very day, a tremendous shout of "Aye, aye!" arose all around. "Set us free and we will go home! Strike off our bonds and we want no more!"

Then Richard said, "Then, my masters, the matter is finished. Let one man from every lordship and liberty stay behind to receive the charters which we will have forthwith written out, setting you free from your bonds: and the rest of you turn and be off to your homes, taking with you my free pardon for all that has been done amiss. And that no man may doubt or deny

what I have promised, every shire, lordship and liberty shall have a banner of my arms delivered with the charter to confirm this my grant."

The boy-king sat back on his horse and looked round to see the effect of his words : and now, indeed, he might well feel that he had produced a sensation. All round him were men shouting, cheering him, sobbing with joy as if they had been children, with tears streaming down their bronzed cheeks. The King smiled and bowed, and made a sign to his knights to depart : but as he wheeled his horse round, something new occurred. A townsman with square cap and burgess's gown came and knelt before the King in the road, holding up his hands in petition, and Alan, who could not for the moment see the man distinctly, heard one of the knights say, "By'r lady, but yonder is the same Herts knave who has been on his knees to pester the King all the way from the City hither !" Alan moved round to get a better view, and to his surprise perceived that the suppliant was no other than William Grindecobbe, who was clasping his sturdy hands, and saying, "Have mercy, good my lord King, upon your faithful lieges of St Albans town, and restore to us the charters which good King Harry gave us, whereof the Abbots of St Albans Abbey

have wrongfully robbed us ever since the days of King Edward the Second !”

“It is the St Albans fellow again,” said the King laughing to one of his knights ; he was in high good humour at his own success and popularity. “Methinks he deserves something for his perseverance. Six times, I believe, thou hast been on thy knees before me this morning about those charters of thine, thou importunate knave.”

“I have, your Grace,” said Grindecobbe, “and to get what I pray for I would go down on my knees not six times, but six hundred !”

“Six hundred ! that would be ill for me,” laughed Richard. “Come, good man, if better may not be, I must needs hear thee now, and finish thee off with the Essexmen and their matters, and the clerks that write out their charters can deal with thine.”

He signed to the secretary to come up, and Wallingford and Cadynndon of St Albans, who had accompanied Grindecobbe upon his expedition, came up to him, and explained briefly enough what was the question of the charters of St Albans.

“Good fellows,” said the King, “you also shall have your desire. Let one of you stay behind in like manner with the Essexmen, and you shall

have a requisition to the Abbot that he will restore you your rights, and I will sign it, and your fellow shall bring it with him to St Albans. Get a plenty of writing knaves, Master Secretary, and make an end of the writing as soon as may be."

The King rode off amid enthusiastic cheering ; and after arranging that Richard of Wallingford should stay for the charter, Grindecobbe, turning round, found Alan at his elbow.

"Thou here, Alan?" said he. "I thought thou wert in safety with Peter Piper. I trust thou hast not shown him a clean pair of heels?"

Alan explained about Piper's death, and even before he got to the end of his story a great shout went up from the crowd round him which might have been heard on Tower Hill, for the first of the charters had already been finished, manumitting Ralph Rushen of Rivenhall from bondage to his lord. And then, looking round, they saw that all the crowd was astir: men were shouldering their wallets and handling their staves and shaking hands with their comrades to bid them farewell. "'Tis like a beehive when the bees swarm," said Grindecobbe. "And now, Alan, where goest thou, my son?"

"I go to St Albans with you, master, if I may,"

said Alan. "But now tell me of your doings: I have heard say that Herts is risen, and encamped at Highbury. Did you come thence to-day?"

"I came thence to-day," said Grindecobbe, "but only turned aside thither to see Tiler, who is there to-day. Yester evening the men of Barnet came to St Albans with news of the riots, and would we march up with them to avenge our wrongs with theirs? Well, every prentice in the town was wild to be off: but we burgesses agreed that Cadyndon and Barber and Wallingford and I should first take counsel with the Abbot, lest if he heard from others that we had gone to London, he should at once inform against us that we had joined the rioters. So at midnight we went to the Abbey and prayed to see the Abbot, and we told him what the Barnet men had said—that Tiler was at Highbury with twenty thousand men, preparing to march our way to deliver all villains from their lords, and to give over to fire and sword all who withstood him."

"Is Tiler so bloodthirsty? That are not we," said Alan.

"Some of it may be bug-a-boo," said Grindecobbe, "but that was the message the Barnet men gave us, and we gave the Abbot. And sure enough the brethren and the Abbot himself were terrified

out of their wits. Their faces grew pale, their knees trembled, their teeth chattered; and when we proposed to ride to Highbury and there make terms with Tiler to hinder his coming to either town or Abbey, the Abbot caught at it as a drowning man at a straw. 'Go for God's sake, good masters,' he said, 'and four of the brethren shall go with you to speak for the Abbey when you speak for the town. Prior, wilt thou go with the burgesses?' 'Father,' said the Prior, 'I would go with goodwill, but I have the gout in my foot. The Sub-chancellor would do as well, and he would not incommode the good burgesses by his infirmity of body like me.' 'Nay,' said the Sub-chancellor, 'for the evil disposed have a grudge against me respecting the house which I built in the Fishmarket.' Thou knowest, Alan, he had two houses, one on either side of the Fishmarket, and he joined them by a third which hath shut all air and light out of the market."

"I know," said Alan, "that was before I left St Albans."

"Well, first one and then the other tried to put it off on someone else, but at last the Abbot grew weary of it, and named four to ride with us as soon as the dawn broke, and see Wat Tiler, and keep him if we could from bringing the Kentish-

men on us. But the Abbey folk heard tidings that he would have naught to do with religious, but hated them all like poison, and the long and the short was that they left us to deal with Tiler, and rode themselves on to London to speak to the Archbishop. We went to Tiler alone."

"And how sped you with him? Was he well-disposed?"

"I can hardly say. Betwixt ourselves, I think the power to which he hath risen so suddenly hath turned his head."

"And Straw is always at his ear, murmuring words about sword and fire," said Alan.

"Well, we told him that we were about to ask for our rights from the King, and that we would fain win them peaceably, so that we hoped that he would not trouble himself to visit St Albans, but turn his attention to other towns in sorer need: whereto he said that if we could manage our matters without help, it would be well, but if not, we might tell the Abbot that he would send twenty thousand men to shave their beards, and hang him and his monks from the Minster Tower."

"That is the way he speaks of late," said Alan. "Kirkby questioned me whether he might have

taken a sunstroke waiting all those days on the river bank, but I think it is all this coil and buzz of men that has unhinged his brain."

"Then," said Grindecobbe, "we rode to the church of St Mary le Bow, and then we heard that the King was coming this morning to Mile End to treat with the Essexmen, and we thought this would be our best chance. We rode quickly and waited outside Aldgate for him to come out of the City and there first I knelt and prayed him to right the wrongs of our poor town, and his knights jeered and would have driven me away, but again and again, whenever the King halted, I knelt again and put up my petition, until at last, like the poor widow in Holy Writ, I wearied him out and gained my point. And now, for that I am wearied out also and need some sustenance, wilt thou come with me and Master Cadyndon and dine?"

Meanwhile, if the rejoicing Essexmen had only known it, that was occurring which was only too likely to change their success into defeat. Richard's action that morning had been his own initiative: he had long chafed under the management of his uncles and the Council of Regency, and with the aid of some of his knights who thought it as well to cultivate the favour of the crescent orb, he had

escaped from his guardians, taken boat to Shadwell, and thence taken horse for Mile End. He thought it was wiser to return not to the Tower but to his mother's house within the City, and thither he arrived to find all his family there before him, and the retinue whom he had left at the Tower, in agitated terror and indignation beyond words. While he had been at Mile End, a body of Kentishmen had come to Tower Hill, where Straw and his marshmen were encamped, and had demanded to see the King, whom they wished to deliver from the hands of his evil counsellors. Richard was not to be found, and though there were six hundred guards in the Tower, none resisted the rioters, who swarmed all over the Tower to search for the King. They found the knights of the household, but they did them no violence beyond pulling their beards in rough horseplay and telling them they were now and for ever their equals and good comrades; they rushed into the chamber of the Princess Joan, the King's mother, and offered to kiss her, which caused the terrified lady to swoon upon her bed; but they harmed none until entering the Norman chapel at the top of the Tower they found the Archbishop, the Treasurer, the poll-tax commissioner and a few more taking sanctuary. Then the wild beast awoke: they dragged these men out of the chapel

110 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

and down upon Tower Hill, and there cruelly dispatched them, on the ground that they were the cause of all mischief in the realm, and had sought to keep the King apart from his faithful lieges. London was now practically in the hands of Straw, Tiler, and the Kentishmen, and all Richard had done was to dismiss the Essexmen, the party of order who might have acted as a moderating element upon the rest.

This was what the Duke of Lancaster told his nephew sternly and severely, and the fifteen-year-old boy stood before his uncle bewildered and stubborn in the terrible revulsion that he felt from the intoxication of success and popularity which he had tasted that morning at Mile End. Still, he tried to hold his own.

"I did but what I thought to be the duty of a king, sir," he said, looking at Gaunt's grim face, which showed no sympathy with the boy's trouble. "And if the Archbishop and the Treasurer—God rest their souls—had let me land and speak with the people at Southwark, maybe they would not have brought the hatred of these men upon them. They bear no hatred to me, do they, Sir George?" He turned to one of the knights who had been with him that morning.

"No, your Grace: they cheered and shouted for

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE III

you till you might have heard them here," said Sir George.

"If the King of England," said Lancaster, "shows a heart so craven as to take part with the lowest of his subjects in the murder of his own servants and good counsellors, he had better beware lest England will have none of him."

With which the old lion turned round and walked away, leaving Richard in humiliation proportional to his exultation in the morning.

CHAPTER IX

ALAN proposed to walk back to St Albans while Grindecobbe and Cadyndon rode, but Grindecobbe, saying the roads were not safe for a solitary traveller, made him mount behind him on his horse. The roads were all aswarm with St George's men who, on hearing at Highbury of the King's visit to Mile End and the concession of the charters, made up their minds that their point was gained, and set their faces to return home, leaving a few to represent each "manor and liberty" which was to be enfranchised. Many of these, however, hearing that St Albans town was making a stand against the Abbey, turned in that direction, for the hand of the Abbey lay heavy not only upon St Albans town, but upon some thirty-two Herts towns and villages where the Minster owned property. Accordingly, when, not long after sunset, the party entered the town, they found the open space to the west of the Minster, known as Romeland, filled with St George's

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 113

men who were preparing to spend the night there.

Grindecobbe had not reached his own door before a messenger came to pray his attendance at the Moot Hall, to consult with the other townsmen, and Alan took his hackney to the stable, and then went into the well-known house. The door was opened by pretty Maudlen, who held up her hands crying "Gramercy, it is Alan himself!" and before either of them remembered anything else, they were clasped in each other's arms, and Maudlen was laughing and crying at once upon Alan's shoulder.

"My pretty one, my sweetheart," said Alan, "never weep. We are all safe."

"Oh, Alan, I have dreamed every night that thou wert lying dead or wounded on the bloody ground, and none to help thee!"

"'Tis a false dream, dear, bred of thy fear for me. Poor Master Piper was foully slain by robbers, but I got nothing worse than a clow on my pate."

"And hast thou fought under the banner of St George, and killed anyone, Alan?"

"I have killed no one as yet: thank God we have won our point with no bloodshed. Nay, I think my only adventure hath been to save one whom others sought to kill. What a noble pasty, Maudlen! yet it is not nobler than my hunger,

H

114 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

which is right royal to-night. We have not seen such victuals as these for days and days."

"But tell me," said Maudlen, when Alan had to some extent assuaged his hunger on the great pasty, "about thy adventure in saving the man whom they sought to kill."

Alan told her, modestly enough, of his rescue of Hugh De Rivers, and she listened with eager admiration.

"Hugh De Rivers, whose mother is Dame De Rivers of Faulkbourn Hall near Witham in Essex," said Maudlen. "I shall remember his name."

"Why shouldst thou wish to remember any man's name but mine?" said Alan.

"Because of the promise he made thee, to do thee good if need should be," said Maudlen.

"Faugh! My hand can keep my head, I trust," said Alan, "without being beholden to any young lordling of them all."

"None can tell in these days," said Maudlen, sagely shaking her becaped head.

The young Grindecobbes were all out in the streets, and Alan was thinking of a heap of clean straw as a highly desirable resting-place for the night, when the market bell began to ring, and the town crier came round to call all well-disposed inhabitants of the town to the market-place to

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 115

hear the orders of the Mayor and Corporation. Alan rose rather stiffly, and went out to obey the summons, leaving poor Maudlen to lament "Alack, alack, why was I not born a lad?" But as her aunt had now come in, the young pair could not part as lovingly as they had met.

The orders given out at the Moot Hall were that all townsmen should meet next day at sunrise to demand their rights; and the crier cried, "O yes, O yes! Let no man bide at home to-morrow, but let all come together with weapons to demand their ancient rights; wherein if any man fail, he shall be hanged by the neck, his house pulled down, and his goods forfeit."

"What is to be done?" said Alan as he joined Grindecobbe and his sons as they left the Moot Hall.

"We are to go to Fawnton Wood, and other woods and warrens which the Abbey hath enclosed to the wrong of the town, take off the gates and take away the palings. Some were for keeping the wood for the use of the town, but Cadyndon and I said no; we would break up and destroy the gates, but we would make no profit of them for our own use, lest the Abbot should say we rob him."

Great was the joy of the young Grindecobbes at

116 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

the prospects of the morrow, but Alan was almost too weary to put one foot before the other, and when Hal Grindecobbe shoved him awake a very few hours later, he could have given up all the coming joys of the day for a little more sleep. "Wake up, wake up, slug-a-bed!" said Hal, "such doings as were last night after we came in! They went to the fish-market and pulled down the Sub-chancellor's house, and they say that Prior Moote and the Sub-chancellor and three more of the brethren took horse before daybreak and rode northward on fleet horses. So may they all fly, and leave us in peace!"

The projected excursion of the townsmen to destroy the gates and palings of the woods and warrens enclosed by the Abbey took place between sunrise and noon, and though the burgesses succeeded in keeping their too eager assistants from wanton mischief, there was as much fun and noise among the young folks as even they could desire. One lad named Robert Parker caught a live rabbit on the warren, saying it was seizin of the town's property which the Abbot had retained for these fifty years: he took it home and fastened it into the pillory, which was just opposite Grindecobbe's house. Here the boys would have stoned it, had not Maudlen Grindecobbe ransomed it for the sum

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 117

of a penny ; but that rabbit was to cost a human life before it was done with.

Alan, however, found the sport of destruction of gates and palings somewhat tame after the exciting events of the last ten days, and he persuaded Hal Grindecobbe to slip away from the others as they were on their way to Monkwood, and to go with him to the London road to see if Wallingford could be seen with the mandate from the King for the restitution of the charters. The two youths climbed up an oak tree whence they could overlook a long stretch of road. The road seemed deserted ; few travellers went on foot in those days, pedlars chose by-roads, and horsemen rode only in strong companies. Once a grey friar came along and went on to the town ; a shepherd with his dog crossed the road and went into a by-lane, and then, after a long waiting, there was a cloud of dust with a sparkle through it, which was the sun's glint upon a steel cap. Then they saw that it was a man on horseback with a great pennon, and other riders following him : all were riding as fast as they could, spurring their horses, and as they came near, the pennon blew wide, and Hal clutched at Alan's arm, and said, "'Tis our banner—the Banner of St George !"

"'Tis Richard of Wallingford, which is more

118 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

important still," said Alan, letting himself down from the oak bough. Hal did the same, and both lads ran as hard as they could to the town gates, and got in just behind the standard-bearer, to join their shouts to those of the crowds who lined the streets, who laughed and shouted as Wallingford reached his hand to one and another, and assured them that he bore the King's letter safely in his bosom.

Even as he spoke there was a rush made towards the Abbey. "Let us fire the Abbey! Sack it! Hang the Abbot from the Minster tower. Down with Prior Moote!" cried many of the wilder spirits, intoxicated with success, and would have rushed to their work then and there. But Grinde-cobbe and the more respectable burgesses headed them back, and Wallingford, with great presence of mind, saved the situation. "Good folk," he cried, "follow me; I go to plant the Banner of St George in front of the Abbey!" And dismounting, he took the flagstaff in his arms, and carried the flag with all its gay folds fluttering in the breeze, till he came in front of the Abbot's new gateway which still remains standing in St Albans of to-day. Here he ordered a space to be cleared, and in the midst of the space he planted the banner. Then he said to the foremost of the crowd who seemed to be yearning to taste blood,

"Take heed of the banner of St George, good folk, for it is our advanced guard. Let no man leave it to go forward or back, but gather around it and wait beside it till we come out of the Abbey bearing the Abbot's reply to the King. We are on the King's business, and none must say the bands of St George hindered the King when he took our side."

Thus having transformed the would-be assailants of the Abbey, for the time being, into guards to the banner, Grindecobbe, Cadynndon, Barber, Wallingford and the chief burgesses of the town, entered the Abbey nave, and a stately brother with a determined countenance met them and said, "Worshipful sirs, what is it you seek?"

"Good father," said Wallingford, "the Commons have obtained from King Richard a royal letter authorising them to claim their ancient rights from the Abbey, and this royal letter I have to deliver into the hands of the Abbot himself."

"It is not customary, good masters, to demand that his lordship the Abbot of St Albans should attend on the townsmen in his own nave."

"Nothing, good father, is customary just now," said Wallingford, "but since we have but now left an angry crowd at our heels, who but for our persuasion would have made their way hither with no good intention, and are ready to tear us in pieces

for withstanding their will, perhaps the Abbot will for once waive all ceremony and allow us to present the King's letter."

The Abbot came into the nave, with the brethren behind him, two and two in a long train. It was told afterwards that when he heard that the townsmen had sent for him into the Church, he declared that he had rather die than yield a jot of the privileges of the Abbey which had been won with so much care and struggle, to the enemies of the blessed Alban. But his monks, who were very justly alarmed for their own necks, persuaded him so far to yield as to meet the burgesses and hear what they had to say. Master Wallingford bowed low, and handed the King's letter to the Abbot without more words. The Abbot received it, pale and stern with the humiliation which cut his proud soul; his fingers trembled so that they could scarcely hold the silken bag in which the letter was enclosed. Master Grindecobbe prayed that it might be read aloud, and Brother Hendon read it. It ran thus:—

"To the Abbot of St Albans,

THOMAS DE LA MARE:

"Very dear in God: At the petition of our beloved lieges of the town of St Albans we will and

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 121

command that certain charters in your keeping, made by our progenitor King Henry to the burgesses and good folks of the said town, concerning rights of common, of pasture, of fishing, and of certain other commodities expressed in the same charters, as they tell us, you do cause to be delivered to the said burgesses and good folks, according as law and right shall require, that so they may have no ground of complaining hereafter unto us for such cause. Given under our signet at London, June 15, in the fourth year of our reign.

RICHARD REX."

The Abbot and the monks looked at one another, but found no comfort in each other's eyes. Then the Abbot turned to Grindecobbe and Cadyndon. "Good folk," he said, "you ask of me what goes against my conscience: I may not give up the patrimony of the blessed Alban. It is against my duty as head of this monastery to give up its rights, lawfully won by me and my predecessors."

"My lord Abbot," said Grindecobbe, "what the law gives the law can take. The King's grant has caused much loss to the towns, when the monasteries have had his ear: now we of the towns have gained his ear, and we trust to win back what we have lost."

"My masters, I can give no answer at once. I must have time to consult my Chapter concerning the King's letter."

"My lord Abbot," said Wallingford, "we would willingly accord you all that courtesy requires, but you see yourself that there is no time for delay. Yester morning we burgesses saw Wat Tiler at Highbury, we told him that we were on our way to ask the King for the restitution of our rights, and that if, as we hoped, we obtained his mandate, we should not need the help of the Kentishmen, for neither we nor you desire their presence here. Then he said that he would not come if he were not needed, but, said he, should the Abbot delay to obey the King's mandate, I will come with twenty thousand men at my back to shave their beards and hang them from the tower of their own minster. And not only the Kentishmen, but the men of Herts outside speak of fire and slaughter, and are in that mood that we have had much ado to keep them from assaulting the Abbey——"

The Abbot stood up and wrung his hands. "Alack, alack, good neighbours, for this thirty-two years I have been your easy Abbot and father, and never have I harmed or done you ill; when you have been in straits with pestilence or famine, my hand has always been open to supply your

needs ; and now you seek for no cause to undo me, your easy friend and master——”

“ My lord Abbot,” said Cadyndon, “ in all personal matters we have found you just and easy, even if you may have been severe in upholding the interests of the Abbey ; we would fain have left you in peace till your death, and fought the matter out with your successor, but the time is come that we have no choice. Outside the minster the people stand in thousands, ready to tear us in pieces if we tarry too long ; and they will have no scruple like us, in sending for Tiler and his twenty thousand Kentishmen.”

As if to reinforce Cadyndon’s words, a storm of blows at this moment rang upon the great door of the nave, and shouts came from the crowd outside. “ Good neighbours,” said the Abbot, “ for God’s sake go out and pacify the people, and you shall have all you demand.”

“ Give us then, my lord Abbot, the charters that King Henry gave us and that Abbot Richard took away, and the bond in which we lie to be assessed for three thousand marks,” said the burgesses, mentioning other matters concerning which the town had a claim, such as bonds of servitude and other parchments signed under compulsion from the Abbot.

"Everything, everything," said the Abbot, "so you will keep them out of the Abbey."

Wallingford and Cadyndon remained to wait for the charters, while the other burgesses went out again to tell the commons that the cause was gained. It was all that the party of order could do to keep the crowd from battering in the doors: but when Grindecobbe and Barber came out from a side-door with their arms full of parchments, Grindecobbe cried out with his great voice, "Good folk, let us all come together to the Market Cross, and there light a great fire to consume all these bonds of servitude, which at the King's behest have been delivered to us." The project pleased the mob, who followed the burgesses away from the Abbey to the market-place, and thus for the time left the monks in peace.

Against the Market Cross faggots were fetched and straw laid for the bonfire, and Grindecobbe stood up on the steps of the Cross and spoke to the crowd. "Sirs," he said, "so far we have prospered, thanks to God and the blessed George, under whose holy banner we fight. We have still to see our claims made good; wherefore I pray you that while we stand staunch to battle for our rights none of us shall commit any violence, nor go beyond the law. There are many who speak of the commons

as though we were rough and rude fellows to be despised and trampled down, as those that know not how to obey the law; let us show that we glory in the name and will do nothing that may disgrace it—let us have no rioting, nor suffer others to riot, but let us claim our rights and defend them with courage and calmness.”

There came a wild tumult of applause, and Hal, who was standing by Alan, said, “We found it hard enough to tackle these fellows when the burgesses were in the Abbey, but father seems to sway them like feathers in the wind.”

“Aye,” said Alan. “He calls up what is best in them, and all men love to feel themselves better than they knew.”

“Be there to be no sacking of rich men’s houses then?” said a strange young man who was standing near, in evident disappointment.

“Nay,” said Alan, “thou wouldst not have our bands disgraced, master?”

“I know not why one should call it disgrace,” said a stranger; “doth not Ball preach that the kernels of wheat should be ground to one size, and that ’tis shame for the rich to swill while the poor go hungry?”

“Yet,” said Alan, “Ball preacheth also that if might go before right, then is our mill misdight.”

And thinking controversy, in the present condition of the mob, somewhat perilous, he lifted up his clear baritone voice and started the well-known chant which had for its chorus "When Adam delled and Eva span," and all the crowd joined in, while the flames leapt up and crackled the old parchments which were thrown into them, and shrivelled and shrank and blackened in the heat.

Even then, however, there were a few unruly spirits who preferred lawlessness to the triumph of law, and the houses of the two Abbey bailiffs, Scriveyn and De la Chambre, were sacked and their contents destroyed. It was the destruction of the Savoy again on a minute scale, but it gave the Abbot a handle which he made use of later on.

CHAPTER X

THE flames in the bonfire at the Market Cross were dying down, and the crowds were surging back to Romeland, when the town-clerk, looking very serious, came up to a group of burgesses who were standing together, with a very old man beside him.

"Worshipful masters," he said, "I fear me the Abbot hath played us false. Among the charters that were given to us this morning the most important charter of all hath not been returned. Here is Master Weldon, that was town-clerk in King Edward the Second's time, that I called to look to these charters and see that they were the same he remembered, and he saith that '*De libertatibus villanorum*' is not here."

"It is true, good sirs," said the old man's thin voice, quavering with age. "It was the most precious of all that we lost, and I can see it yet before mine eyes. There were two letters on the first page, one blazoned in gold and one in azure,

and nothing is like it among those that came from the Abbey but now."

"This is heavy news," said Cadyndon looking at Grindecobbe; "methinks it were well to deal with it ourselves and to keep it from the ears of the crowd."

But it was too late for this. The rumour had already reached the crowd, who were shouting, "Foul play, foul play!" and a beam was crashing in the great door of the nave on one side, while on the other a crowd was besieging the Abbot's gateway. This gateway was a substantial building, with chambers on each side and a dungeon below. Grindecobbe went to the crowd at the west door, and with much difficulty persuaded them to leave the Abbey alone, at least till the burgesses had again seen the Abbot and tried to extract "*De libertatibus villanorum*" from him. Finally he left Alan and his sons to guard the west door, and with his fellow-burgesses went in to interview the Abbot for the second time.

The west door was guarded, but the gateway door was forced, and no resistance was made when the mob made their way into the dungeons under the gateway and brought out the prisoners whom they found there. There were eighteen of these, and seventeen were released, but the eighteenth, a

murderer, was hung on the spot, to show, as the people said, that they sought to uphold the law, and not to break it. When this excitement was over, the west door again became the centre of interest, and when it opened again and Grindecobbe and Cadyndon came out with no charter, and nothing better to say than that the Abbot was still searching for it, they cried, "The Abbot, the Abbot! Let us hear the Abbot speak himself!" A message was sent in, and presently the west door opened again, and Thomas de la Mare himself came out with a great book under his arm.

"Good folk," he said, "I pray you cease your clamour. I am searching everywhere for the charter you desire, but I have never seen it with my own eyes. I have asked all the major brethren, and they in their turn are questioning the minor brethren: and that ye may trust my good faith, here in this book is a copy of the charter you describe. But the original I solemnly declare that since I have been Abbot, neither I nor any of the brethren have ever seen."

While the burgesses looked at the copy which the Abbot showed them, and the dim-eyed old town-clerk of Edward II.'s reign was brought forward to identify them, a new cry arose among the crowd. "Our millstones, our millstones! Give

us back our millstones, that are in the Abbot's parlour!"

"Good folk," said the Abbot, "have patience, and the millstones shall be delivered to you. They are cemented down in the pavement, and cannot be taken up without mason's tools."

"If that be all," said Grindecobbe, "my prentices can fetch their tools before a man counts a hundred, and will spare your lordship the trouble of taking the millstones out, so you give them leave to enter."

The Abbot demurred, but in a moment, as it seemed, all the masons in St Albans had come forward in a body, and these, with Grindecobbe at their head, passed through the great gate behind the Abbot and into a passage which led to the cloisters, out of which passage opened the door of the chamber called the Abbot's Parlour. The prising up of the millstones from the pavement was a very quick business, for many eager hands made light work; and a yell of delight arose outside when the masons reappeared, trundling the stones along the ground like children's hoops. This was followed by a cry from someone, "Break up the millstones, and give us each a chip to keep;" and Grindecobbe saw in this another opportunity of employing the crowd so as to divert their

thoughts from the destruction of the Abbey. The millstones were broken up, and the people were bidden to come up one by one, receive each his chip of stone, and pass down the further side, which, as Walsingham relates, they did solemnly, "like men who receive holy bread in church," and some kept those chips of stone until their dying day.

After a while, however, the chips were exhausted, and the charter was not found ; and the destruction of the Abbey resumed its attractiveness. One party of Barnet men from the crowd went so far as to lay faggots before the inner gateway of the Abbey—the outer gateway being now undefended—and would have fired the door but that Grindecobbe and Cadyndon, hearing of it in time, forced themselves through the crowd, and climbing upon the faggots Grindecobbe cried out, "Off with you, evil knaves ! One half of you be strangers and chance-comers from other parts of the shire ; and think you to strike the first blow on this great Abbey of ours, and not we who are burgesses and sons of the town ? We of St Albans choose to determine what we will do to our own Abbey : when we come to your help you may give orders, but here we give our own."

"Aye," said Master Cadyndon ; "if aught is to

be pulled down we will give orders ; meantime it is for the burgesses to lead, and you to follow."

The Barnet men drew off with sulky faces, like dogs baulked of a bone ; but they obeyed Grindecobbe, and made no further attempt to attack the Abbey. And soon after this a fresh diversion occurred, for the side-door opened, and a train of brethren came out, carrying with them great baskets of loaves and jacks of ale. Grindecobbe's brother was in charge of them, and he came to Grindecobbe.

"Our holy Abbot," he said, "returning good for evil as befits a Christian man and a saint, sends you out food for your hungry followers, lest they should starve or be driven by hunger to sack the bakers' shops."

"The town," said Grindecobbe, without much effusion, "returns its grateful thanks to the holy Abbot."

By this time the sun was setting, and the burgesses proposed that the crowd should disperse for the night ; but they said they would spend the night where they were, for they would not depart till *De libertatibus villanorum* came to hand. The Abbot sent for Grindecobbe again, and offered to make out any new charter the townsmen pleased to ask, in place of the one that was lost ; but

Grindecobbe persisted that the ancient charter was more to the burgesses than any new one could be. "For, holy father," he said, "we do not desire to extort from you new and unjust claims; we come to ask only for our own, to which we have a right in law and justice. Therefore we pray you to-night to continue your search, and to-morrow doubtless when you stand in the pulpit of the Abbey church, and we come in for your sermon, you will be able to satisfy us."

Grindecobbe was a strong man, but he came to his house that night almost worn out. "What has made you so weary, father dear?" said Maudlen, fondling his hand as he sat back in his great chair.

"Child," he said, "I have been holding a pack of mad dogs all day in a leash, and dealing at the same time with him they were straining at. If that is not enough to weary a man out, tell me what is!"

He rose and went off to his chamber, and Maudlen arranged the meal for her brothers and Alan, who had come back later still. She was housekeeper now, for her aunt had lately become the fourth wife of Master Long, a worthy burgess in the next street. Alan followed her into the kitchen.

"See here, sweetheart," he said, bringing a chip

of stone out of his pouch. "Knowst thou what this is, that I have brought thee for a keepsake?"

"What is it?" said Maudlen.

"Dost thou remember our old game, 'Six millstones, heigh, six millstones, ho, we'll win them if we can, O?'" His eyes danced with triumph.

"Have they been won at last? But I thought they were cemented down in the Abbot's parlour!"

"Aye, but the master has had them out for all that. The Abbot was ready to gnaw his fingers for spite, but nought availed him!"

"Father says he has been holding mad dogs in a leash all day," said Maudlen. "Well, I shall keep my bit of millstone to my dying day and have it buried with me, Alan. I never thought our old game would come true! Oh, there is someone knocking at the door: go and open it, Alan, and say that father must not be disturbed any more to-night."

"Is Master Grindecobbe within?" said a voice. "I have news for him that must be given at once."

Maudlen, much against her will, went upstairs to call her father down, and the visitor proved to be one William Seaborn, well known to the family, who had gone to Highbury with the Herts bands of St George.

"I have ill news, Master," he said, "for your ear. They be not yet known in the town, and I came straight hither that you should hear them first."

"Tell them here," said Grindecobbe, closing the door between hall and kitchen. "Here be none but my sons and my daughter. But wet thy whistle first."

Alan felt a glow of delight at his heart at hearing himself thus classed with the family.

Seaborn drank a horn of ale, and then said, "The long and short of it is, Wat Tiler is slain, and no man seems to know what to do next."

"Tiler slain!" rose in chorus of surprised voices.

"Aye, I saw it with my own eyes. It was thus. Yesterday, when the King came back from Mile End, he heard of the riots, and the slaughter of the Archbishop and the Treasurer. That was Straw and Starling and the marshmen, we had nought to do with it. Then he sent to the city to ask for help, and he sent to Tiler to offer us the same terms that the Essexmen of Mile End had taken. But Tiler rode on his high horse, and said the Kentishmen were no poor villains like the Essexmen, but free yeomen; and they would not go home unless the King would abolish all lawyers and escheaters, and all who had to do

with law, so that plain matters might be dealt with by plain men. And so nothing was done yesterday, and Tiler was mighty uplifted in his mind, because he had refused the King's terms : and putting his hand to his mouth he said, ' Within four days out of this mouth shall issue all the laws of England.' "

" A poor lot of laws they would be," said Will Grindecobbe.

" He was strange in his ways, and would stop in his speech and break off short, and lose the thread of his thought," said Seaborn, " and some said he was going mad. And this morning, when we were in Smithfield, up rides Sir John Newton with a message from the King, and using no more courtesy than he could help, he bids Tiler come at once to the King, to speak concerning what he wished about the charters, and not delay. Then said Tiler, ' If thou art in so great haste, depart at once ; I will come at my leisure.' And he did not go to the King : but the King presently riding with his knights, and with Walworth the Mayor and Master Rafe Standish of the City in his train, came through Smithfield, and met Tiler on foot with a great force behind him. Then the King sent Sir John Newton again to bid Tiler come to his presence, and Newton rode up

and delivered his message. Then Tiler said, 'It better beseems thee to approach me on foot rather than on horseback;' and Newton said with scorn in his voice, 'What is amiss if I on horseback come to thee set on horseback?' and we all understood that he meant, 'Set a beggar on horseback and let him ride to the devil:' and with that he leapt to the ground, but Tiler in a fury ran at him with his dagger, and Sir John drew his, and the King rode up between them crying, 'Peace, peace! no fray here! Sir John, give up your dagger!' And Tiler caught at the bridle of the King's horse, and the Lord Mayor knocked him down with a blow on his head, and Standish with his long dagger pierced his side; and there he lay on the ground, beating his hands to and fro for a few moments, poor man, till at last he gave up his unhappy ghost."

"And what happened then?" said Grindecobbe.

"All was over in so short a time that if I had not been close behind him I should scarce have known what had happened: but one and another whispered that Tiler was slain, Rudge gave order to the bowmen, who were in front, to bend their bows; but before they could shoot, the King rode up and cried, 'What will you, my men, what mean you? I will be your leader in place of him that

is slain : follow me into the fields, and you shall have all that you desire.' And being bidden to follow him we followed, and he led us as far as Islington, and there we found ourselves betwixt a force of the King's men, and a great company of the City train-bands, whom Walworth and Standish had ordered out from the City. And we gave ourselves up for lost, for they all prepared on two sides at once to ride at us, but the King rode forward and stopped them. 'Nay,' he said, 'they were but led away, and they have trusted my word ; let them come no more into the City, but disperse quietly to their homes.' And thus I made my way hither. But what is to do now, I know not, nor who is the leader of St George's bands now Tiler is slain."

"Tiler was never the leader of our Essexmen," said Alan.

"Maybe not, but your Essexmen have dispersed and gone home."

"I trust the Abbot may not learn of Tiler's death till the charter is safe in our hands," said Grindecobbe, as he rose stiffly from his seat. "I must tell this to Cadyndon and Barber."

The burgesses in council decided to keep the news of Tiler's death dark for the present, lest the Abbot should hear of it and hold back the charter,

and the Sunday morning broke upon the bands of St George still ignorant that anything had occurred to alter the situation. Grindecobbe called his family up betimes to go with him to hear an early mass at St Peter's Church. "'Tis as well," he said, "that we should see to our immortal souls in these days as well as we may, for if our side should go down, it may not be many of us that will escape with our lives."

From mass Grindecobbe went to the Moot Hall to consult with the other burgesses as to what should be done that day; and a proclamation had just been made to bid the creditors of the Abbey, many of whom owned long scores which the bursar paid at his own convenience, to bring their bonds to the Abbey and ask for payment, when Wallingford, who was on guard at the gates of the Abbey, came up to say, "Good masters, a band of men-at-arms, under the Lord Thomas Percy and Sir Hugh Seagrave, have but now ridden up to the Abbey gate, and since that is barred, they ride round to the town gate to demand entry, saying that they hold a letter to the burgesses from the King."

"And what may this portend?" said Cadyndon, who had been told by Grindecobbe of Tiler's death.

Grindecobbe shrugged his shoulders. "I would we had got hold of the charter first," he said.

“But methinks we had best not delay taking possession of the liberties we have won and the charters of which we hold in our hands.”

Accordingly it was decided that at four o'clock on that afternoon all townsmen and townswomen should walk round the confines of the town, as was customary in other places at Rogation-tide, but at St Albans had been forbidden by the Abbot because it could not be done without trespassing upon land claimed by the Abbey ; and the rights of way, the rights of common, and the rights of fishing were also to be proclaimed in disputed places by the town crier.

CHAPTER XI

WHILE Grindecobbe was holding back his leash of mad dogs on that Saturday afternoon, one of the crises which mould history without outward show was going on in the Mayor's private room at the Guildhall. Richard had ridden back from Islington with Walworth the Mayor, and Rafe Standish, and the Mayor had invited him to take his "nooning," in other words, lunch, at the Guildhall: and while Richard satisfied his boyish hunger with the appetising viands produced by the Mayor's cook, Standish had written to ask the Dukes, the King's uncles, to come and confer with the King and the Corporation at the Guildhall what would be best done next.

"It was pity Tiler had to be slain, my Lord Mayor," said Richard when the desire of food had given way to the desire of conversation on the boy's part. "I would fain have said we had mastered the rebels without bloodshed."

"Tiler, your Grace, was no safer than a madman.

There was no security but he might have attacked you next."

"Well, I did the best I could after that to get the fellows away from the houses and into the fields. Some mad brain among them might easily have fired the houses about Smithfield, and maybe the city itself might have caught fire."

"The city is greatly beholden to your Grace," said Walworth, bowing as he stood before the boy-king.

"And the poor fellows that have gone free to their homes will for ever be loyal to the crown, because that I have set them free from their bonds," said Richard.

"Aye, my lord; but methinks it remains to be seen what their lords have to say."

"Their lords," said Richard, "may say what they will, but they cannot well enslave their bondsmen again. And 'tis better to have a hundred thousand bondsmen's hearts, than a thousand lords!"

"Yet the lords have to be reckoned with," said Walworth, "and there is much to be done in slaying the ringleaders of the bands."

"Slaying them?" said Richard. "Why, I gave them my royal word that they should not be harmed."

"Remember, your Grace, that the Archbishop,

the Treasurer, and others have been foully murdered. Is no vengeance to be taken for their death?"

"They well-nigh deserved what they got," said Richard. "Had they let me pacify the folk myself at Rotherhithe, they had not been slain."

"We of the City," said the Mayor, without entering upon this question, "have already taken three of the ringleaders: Kirkby and Threader, who led the Essexmen, and Straw who led those they call the marshmen, who slew the ministers at the Tower. We think to behead them to-morrow: meanwhile the aldermen are dealing with them to find out for certain what they would have done had they had their way."

Here came in the Dukes and their retinue, and Lancaster, sitting down stiffly in the great carved chair which the Mayor offered him, turned to Richard. "So, my lord nephew, methinks you have undone a little of the mischief you did yestern morning, now that you have slain Tiler and dispersed his Kentishmen."

"I did not slay Tiler, my lord uncle," said Richard, "and I would not have had him slain. I desire to be a king who reigns in the hearts of my poor subjects, and the hearts of the poor bondsmen are mine."

"Tut, tut," said Gaunt, "if you meddle with men's

matters, nephew Richard, it behoves you to give up being a child, and all that is poor stuff. 'Tis on the lords, not on the bondsmen, that the throne of England rests."

"A fig for the lords!" said Richard angrily. Conscious of having tasted the sweets of independent action, and having behaved with great readiness and presence of mind at a crisis, he was unwilling to return to leading-strings.

"Did I hear you say, my Lord Mayor," said Gaunt, unheeding him, "that some were questioning Straw to know of his intentions? Let us hear what they have learnt."

Two aldermen were summoned to the council chamber, and bowing low to the King and the Dukes, began their story.

"Out of Kirkby and Threader, sire," said the more eloquent of the two, "we have got nothing. They both say that they came up to London for no reason but to see the King and get the bonds of the folk loosed, but from Straw we have learnt much more of the projects which he and Tiler had. We may be truly thankful that the bands are dispersed without more harm done."

"What were these projects?" said Gaunt.

"It was with much pressure that we got Straw to speak," said Master Goldwood, "but at last we

made it plain to him that the axe would be his portion in any case, yet that if he would make a clean breast of his plans, each of us would undertake to pay for three masses yearly for his poor soul. And so at last he spoke, and belched out the black iniquity that had been in his heart, so that it took my breath away and I could scarce speak."

"He is not here now, Master Goldwood, so that that need not hinder your tongue," said Gaunt with scarcely veiled contempt in his tone. "What said he?"

"Well, my lord Duke, this he said. The plot had been to get hold of all the great lords and ministers, and the King's royal uncles, saving your presence, my lord, and do them to death: but they meant to lay hands on the King and carry him about with them for a while for the show of his authority, so that men might think that in obeying them they obeyed the King; then they would, under the King's order, have slain all gentlefolks, all bishops, abbots and parsons, and all knights of St John, but leave the poor friars to serve the churches; and when all this was done, they proposed to slay King Richard himself, and meant that each shire should have its own king, so that Straw should be King of Essex, Tiler of Kent, and so on. And if Tiler had not

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been slain this morning, he saith that London should have been fired in four places this afternoon, and the spoil thereof divided among the poor."

There was a silence. "We have escaped a great calamity by Master Walworth's deed of this morning," said Gaunt at last. "How now, nephew Richard, would it have indeed suited your mind to be carried about like a puppet by these wretches, and give your name for a handle for the slaying of all your faithful subjects?"

Richard writhed in his seat. He had nothing to say. We who look back upon the scene may have a strong suspicion that Straw's plot was either the invention of a diseased brain, or a hysterical attempt to spread panic with his last breath among his conquerors; but it was believed as sober fact in the Hurling-time itself.

"Leave us, my masters, of your courtesy, to speak together with the King," said Gaunt; and when the room was empty of all except Richard and his uncles, Gaunt rose up from his chair and stood before his nephew.

"See now, King nephew, what all this folly comes to," he said. "You have as near wrecked England as any man can: and let me tell you, England will stand no such folly in the man who sits on her throne. King Edward, my father, had other sons

besides my brother Edward—God rest his soul—and other grandsons besides King Richard: and unless you please to abide in tutelage till such time as you are indeed of man's estate, and let them govern who have age and wisdom so to do, there be ways and means to rid you of your crown."

Perhaps no boy of fifteen ever felt bitterer humiliation than Richard did at that moment. That his generous impulses should only have produced a plot in which he was to be carried about, a puppet king in the hands of Straw and Tiler, and that there was nothing to do but to listen patiently to Gaunt's plain speaking, was hard enough upon him: but the consciousness that he had publicly posed as the defender of the oppressed, and had been acclaimed by thousands as their deliverer, and that he must now go back upon his promises, was bitterer than anything else.

"What would you have me do, my lord?" he said at last, in a not over-gracious tone.

"Take part openly with those who defend themselves against the bondsmen. I hear that those bands, whom you dispersed this morning from Islington, collected later on the road to march upon St Albans, and if measures be not taken, who knows but that they will master the Abbey with the help of the townsmen, and slay good Abbot

De la Mare? Since you wrote yesterday to bid the Abbot to give the townsmen their way, methinks it would be well that you should write to the same townsmen to bid them hold their hands from damaging the Abbot, and send the letter by a troop of horse whom he can admit into the Abbey for its defence."

This was the incident of which the first outcome was, that on Sunday morning, June 16th, the two knights, Percy and Seagrave, with their men-at-arms, entered the town gate and presented the King's letter to the burgesses. It ran thus :—

"Richard, by grace of God King of England and France, and Lord of Ireland, to all our lieges and commons of the county of Hertford, and of all other counties adjacent thereto. We do pray and charge and command the most strictly that we may, and upon the faith and allegiance which unto us you owe, that ye neither do nor suffer to be done, as far as in you lies, any grievance, damage, or molestation soever to our very dear in God the Abbot of St Albans, and unto our house and monastery of the said place which is of our patronage, or unto any of the people, monks or others, or unto any of the goods of the said Abbot. For if the said Abbot or his people have offended us towards you, we ourselves will make

him give redress for the same, and make amends as right shall command. And this command take so to heart that we may congratulate you upon the love and loyalty which unto us you bear. Given under our great seal, June 15, in the fourth year of our reign."

The letter was read out by the town crier, and the chief burgesses assured Lord Thomas Percy that they were glad that it had been sent, as it would help them to repress the inconvenient and dangerous zeal of the Hertfordshire bands encamped within the town, who should now only wait till the matter of the missing charter was settled, and the letters of manumission to the Abbey villans signed, and then depart to their homes. But there was a general sense of uncertainty in the air, since the tidings of Tiler's death had become known, which made them all feel that what had to be done had best be done at once, and the promised interview with the Abbot was slightly hurried on.

The townsmen accordingly went again to the Abbey, and interviewed the Abbot afresh respecting the charter. Grindecobbe was the speaker, and he was so moderate and persuasive in his speech that it was commonly reported by the Abbot's party that the townsmen were cowed by hearing of Tiler's death. "My Lord Abbot," he

ended, "I beg you to consider how great an occasion this is for putting an end to the long enmity betwixt town and Abbey. If this charter is delivered into our hands, and the villans thereby enfranchised, we will promise you that henceforth friendship and good feeling will spring up between the villans and the brethren, and so remain for perpetual generations."

Grindecobbe spoke in all good faith, but he was dealing with one whose notion of good faith was unlike his own. The Abbot had decided, in council with Lord Thomas Percy, that his wisest plan would be to give in to the burgesses now, and plead afterwards that his concessions had been extorted by "duress." Accordingly he agreed—though not too readily—to Grindecobbe's demand. He promised to draw up a charter, to hold good till the old one was found, granting all the concessions named in the copy of "*De libertatibus villanorum*," and if the original were not found before Lady-day next, he should swear publicly in the Abbey church that he could not find it, and should pay a thousand pounds to the town. "For," said Grindecobbe, "it is not new rights that we are demanding, but our own ancient liberties."

St Albans town having thus won its cause, the townsmen withdrew to organise a great procession

to take possession of all the rights of way, pasture, fishing, etc., which the Abbey had yielded, which was to go round the boundaries of the town and mark them out as every town and parish then did at Rogation-tide. It was to be a monster picnic, and everyone hurried home to provide eatables which were to be feasted on at various spots at the boundary. Old men and women, stalwart citizens with stout wives, young men and maidens, all met at the town gate with baskets and hand-barrows of provisions: the Herts bands of St George did not join them, for they were waiting at Romeland in front of the Abbey, sending batches of men from time to time to get their charters of manumission signed likewise.

When Alan Harding was an old man he used to say, "Near the last day I was young was that afternoon when we beat the bounds of the town, and cried the rights of way for man and horse. Maudlen walked by her good father's side with a fresh-starched white coif over her dark hair, and I thought her the prettiest lass in St Albans—nay, I was near ready to knock down her brother Jack, when he said she could not hold a candle to his sweetheart Alice Martin—a girl with yellow hair and staring blue eyes. Ah, we laughed fit to die when Mistress Redburn led out her dun cow with a

garland on its horns, saying that her Cusha should have her share in the liberties of pasture, and when Hal Grindecobbe threw a line into the stream to take possession of the fishing rights, and brought out a minnow. And if anyone said St Albans instead of Warlamchester, how we fell upon him and pummelled him, though all in good part! And when after sunset we came back with our empty baskets, I walked with Maudlen, and at each new street I chose some new dwelling for her where we two should live when we were wed. We little thought of what would have come and gone before the next moon was old!"

CHAPTER XII

"ALAN," said Grindecobbe on the morning of Monday, June 17, "Master Deane is sending his son Roger and Jack Martin this afternoon to London to see what hath become of Walter Deane and John Berewick, that the Abbot sent with ten horsemen to aid the King. They seem to have lost themselves in the late disturbances in London, so that no one knows where they be. And if you be willing I would fain send you to confer with my brother Harry, who is of the Dyers' Guild in the City of London, to see how he thinks that matters stand now with the King and the City. My sons would go, but I think thou hast less thick wits than they, and more knowledge of the world besides, though not a better will."

Alan was always ready for action, and in the afternoon he started with his companions for London. London was considerably smaller then than now, and it was possible to find people one looked for: and Walter Deane and John Berewick were lounging

about Cripplegate, which was the ordinary entrance for travellers from St Albans, swaggering considerably in their new London clothes. At once the new arrivals joined them, and there was much to tell on both sides, as they all went together towards the Swan tavern, where Walter and John invited the others to a drink of ale. Alan's way lay in the same direction, and the five young men talked lightly enough as they went on.

"But," said Roger to his brother, "why hast thou changed thy badge? That is not the Abbot's badge, which thou worest when thou didst ride away."

"This is the King's badge," said Walter Deane. "Neither we nor our men cared to show ourselves the Abbot's men when once we were out of St Albans, so we rode up to the King's seneschal and offered ourselves for the King's help without a word of the Abbot, and here we have been ever since, having fine times, I promise you ; we get looked on with a deal more favour for having brought our own men than if we were looked upon as Abbot's underlings !"

"Methinks," said Alan, "it is a fairly perilous game to play. Abbots and churchmen are in league all over the world, and if some day you find yourselves clapped into the Bishop of London's jail at Stortford, I shall not be much astonished."

Roger Deane and Jack Martin were London prentices who had been sent home to St Albans by their masters to be out of mischief during the riots, and they took sides with Alan: and so, walking under London Wall, they came upon a band of soldiers. "That badge is the Abbot's badge, surely," said John Berewick.

"Aye," said Alan; "and if I be not mistaken, yon captain in the helmet is Dick Perrers. If he knows you two, it will go ill with you."

Suddenly silenced, the youths turned down by Basing Hall Street, but they had not gone far when a yelling was heard behind them, and a woman carrying a basket, who stood on the pavement said, "Fly, lads, if it is you they are setting the hue and cry upon." All five turned and ran, for though the three new-comers were innocent of any knowledge why they should be pursued, it was enough in those days to be in company with a man "in trouble" to fall into "trouble" also. The two prentices, knowing London well, made their way to a church which stood somewhat out of the way, through many winds and sharp corners, and there took sanctuary: Alan, being swifter of foot than they, though not so well acquainted with the City, missed one of the turnings, and ran down a narrow passage which proved to be a "dumb" alley.

At the end was a door which he opened and found himself in a room where two women were ironing linen. "Let me hide behind your door," said Alan, panting for breath: "they have set the hue and cry on us, but I have done nought."

"Nay," said the woman, "creep betwixt the folds of this clothes-horse, and I will spread the clean sheets over thee."

No sooner said than done. Alan crouched down, well nigh smothered by the sheets the women spread over him, and was well hidden when the watch came to the door, and asked whether aught had been seen of a long-legged lad flying from justice. "Nay, nay, Master Watch," said the elder woman, "he would know better than to enter an honourable lavender's house," and the watch retired unsuspectingly. After a few minutes she took the sheets off Alan, and called, "Calot, Calot!" and her daughter, who had been in the outer room of the laundry, came in. Neither mother nor daughter was fair, and even the daughter was not young: they were haggard and careworn, but evidently worthy and industrious working people.

"Get a cup of milk for the young man, before he goes on his way, daughter," she said. "What hast thou done, lad, to set the hue and cry on thee?"

"Truly," said Alan, "it is only that I was in company with two that have got themselves into trouble with the Abbot of St Albans."

"Sit thee there for a half-hour or so," said the woman; "my master will be in by then, and if he take thee out into the street none will harm thee."

"How dost thou know I am no highwayman or other ill-doer, good mother?" said Alan, whose smile most elderly women found to be irresistible.

"I know an honest lad when I see one," said the woman, "and I know too that in these days many may get the hue and cry set on them, aye, and a short shrift too, with no ill desert."

"Our Lady bless you for your compassion, mother," said Alan. "My name is Alan Harding of St Albans, but they call me for the most part Alan Leech from my trade. May I know whom I have to thank for saving me?"

"Kit Langland they call me," said she; "I am wife to Master Will Langland, whom you may know by name."

"Not he that wrote the Vision of Piers Plowman?" said Alan.

"None else," said she.

"Truly your husband is a great man," said Alan. "Sure you must love his writings."

"As for that," said the woman, "I have too

much ado to keep a roof over our three heads, and fire on the hearth, and food in the cooking pot, to trouble about my master's writings, let alone that I cannot read, nor Calot neither. For the masses he sings bring him in but little wage, and what he earns mostly goes to paper and parchment, and Calot and I wash and iron all day, and cook his meat and mend his cassock, and leave his writings to him."

Master Langland came in at the time his wife expected, and agreed to walk with Alan to Master Henry Grindecobbe's the dyer's. He was in minor orders, a grave and silent man, who did not approve highly of Alan when he heard that he had been out in the rising with the Essexmen; for however John Ball might admire and quote Langland, Langland disapproved strongly of John Ball. However, he guided Alan safely to the dyer's, and there left him, telling him the sooner he was out of London the better.

So also said Master Henry Grindecobbe when he heard the story, and would have sent Alan out of the City as soon as the gates were open in the morning, but that Alan said he must find out first what had become of his friends. He crept very early to the saddler's shop in Chepe where Roger was prentice, and was relieved to find him outside

unbarring the shutters. He said that he and Jack had bribed the beadle of St Edmund's church, where they had taken refuge, to let them out by a side door, and so they had gone back to their masters as the safest place for them. "But Walter and John," said Roger, "as I hear, having found their spurs and their fine clothes too much in their way to make a clean run for it, have been caught and carried to Newgate, poor wretches, and what will be done to them I know not."

This made Henry Grindecobbe change his view regarding Alan's instant departure. The two St Albans' youths were to be tried that day at noon, and he went to the trial to see if anything could be done for them, taking Alan with him in case a witness was required to declare that they had all been walking quietly in the street when the hue and cry was set upon them. Accordingly Henry Grindecobbe and Alan went to the Guildhall and stood among the crowd, and saw the two brought in fettered and made to stand against the bar—no longer spruce and swaggering as they had been the day before, but sad and downcast enough.

Alan, however, could do nothing to help them. They were arraigned for treason by Richard Perrers' evidence, and the charge that was brought against them was that they had been sent to the

King at the Abbot's charges, but had never presented the Abbot's credentials to the captain of the King's guards, joining instead in the riots, especially in the sacking of the Savoy. The first part of the arraignment was indisputable, and the second was one which they could not call witnesses to disprove, since they, like every other young man in London, had been about all day among the crowd. Accordingly, the judge put on his black cap and condemned them to be beheaded, much to the exultation of the chief witness against them, Richard Perrers the Abbot's squire, who on his side was evidently cast down when Henry Grindecobbe offered bail for them, so that they might see if their relatives at St Albans could intercede with the Abbot on their behalf. So many offences were then punished by death that bail was allowed on almost all, and the young men were set free till the following Thursday.

"Why, sir Squire," said Henry Grindecobbe gravely, "should you thus seek the death of your town fellows, who I dare to say have never harmed you?"

"I war to the death with every greasy burgess of St Albans, who flouts my master the Abbot," said Dick Perrers. "I had enough of them and their

ill-bred brats when I went to school at the Abbey, and I would fain pay back now what they made me to suffer then ! ”

Alan was talking to Deane and Berewick, so that he did not hear these remarks : but as not only the bail for the lads had to be paid into court, but also the jailer's dues, Henry Grindecobbe went to Newgate that afternoon, and took Alan with him. He had business on London Bridge, and went thither on his way.

“ Seest thou those three heads yonder ? ” said the dyer.

“ Aye,” said Alan. “ Whose be they, master ? ”

“ Some thou hast known better than I. Straw, Kirkby, and Threader.”

“ Kirkby ? ” said Alan standing still. “ Him with the bushy beard ? ”

“ Aye. Come on, lad ; 'tis not a sight sweet to the eyes. See, the crows are even now at them——”

“ Kirkby was my master but Friday last, and the King pardoned us all,” said Alan, still standing still, fascinated by the horrible sight.

“ They took him and Threader with Straw, and the Mayor asked nought about the King's pardon, but chopped off their heads for rioting,” said Grindecobbe.

“ Kirkby ! ” said Alan again.

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"Aye, that was it. I hear they will have no more work with axes henceforth, but hang the rest, since it is less trouble to run a noose round their necks."

"I loved Kirkby. He was a good man," said Alan.

"The better for him. Come on, lad. Thou hast stared at them long enough. 'Tis the way life wags. To-day for thee, to-morrow for me. God rest their poor souls!"

"Amen," said Alan, controlling himself, though he felt sick and shaken.

"Maybe," said the dyer, "thou wilt be entertained to walk through Newgate and see the prisoners, while I settle up those young fellows' dues with the turnkey."

This was Alan's first sight of the inside of a prison, but by no means his last. Newgate was not wholly dark, like most mediæval prisons: there was a grating which let in some air and light, but very little; it was close and filthy, and when Alan entered from the June daylight, he could not see who was there. The fettered prisoners sat or lay on a stone floor with a little dirty straw strewn over it, and it was hard to avoid treading on them in the semi-darkness. As he was making his way towards the chamber where he had left Henry Grindecobbe

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 163

chaffering with the turnkey, a fettered hand was lifted to touch him. "A boon, good youth, for a poor prisoner! Canst tell me if those poor fellows that were beheaded yesterday made a good end?"

"I know not," said Alan, "but I knew Kirkby well, and there was no ill in him while he lived."

"Keep it dark, good boy, for thy neck's sake. Aye, I can well believe it; I had talk both with him and with Threader, and I believe they were both of them worthy men and good Christians. As to Straw, I misdoubt that he had but little faith in anything but his own mad thoughts. But Kirkby was taken by chance; he had gone to Straw to persuade him to send back to their homes his marshmen as Kirkby had done his, and was taken with him and given little trial. Well, he had a short passage though painful, and some of us might well envy him that it was over."

"Are you awaiting your trial, master?" said Alan.

"I am awaiting it, but I doubt Death will be quicker than my judge," said the prisoner with a half-amused laugh. "I am Francis Crowe, one of Master Wiclif's Poor Preachers: my crime is writ down that I preached Lollardry and sedition; but I have never had my trial, and I doubt now I never shall have. The Bishop and the Mayor

quarrelled as to whose jurisdiction I came under, and I lie here till they have settled it betwixt them. Meantime I have lost one foot from the eating of the gyves into my flesh, and the other is going the same way, and that will be my death. Nay, good youth, it boots not to cry shame on them. It is the will of God that I should thus suffer. But know you of any kind Christian woman who would come and minister to a young woman who lies yonder—" he pointed to the low partition beyond which the women were imprisoned. "Her name is Mary Beldon; she sought to escape from evil masters, and for that was made a waif. She is dying, and she sorely needs a woman to minister to her."

"She shall have one, for my wife shall come to see to her," said Henry Grindecobbe, who had heard the last part of the Poor Preacher's remarks: "but is there nought we can do for you, Master Priest?"

"Nay," said the Poor Preacher; "I can but wait and endure till God Almighty shall send me His kind messenger, Death. His blessing on you, good sirs, who have had mercy on us poor prisoners!"

From Newgate Henry Grindecobbe took Alan to the Guildhall, to see if there were any chance of a respite for the poor youths, while their friends interceded for them; for now it was Tuesday, and

on Thursday they were to die. All he could get, however, was that the hanging need not take place before sunset on Thursday, which allowed two days to try to save them.

While Grindecobbe went in to confer with the Guildhall authorities, Alan waited outside the Guildhall door, and as he stood there, up came Dick Perrers himself, with his men-at-arms behind him.

"Ha, 'pothecary's boy! methinks thou wert in ill company last night," he said. "How much spoil of the Savoy dost hold hid among the bolus boxes and phials?"

"I was in no company as ill as yours," said Alan; "and I hold just as much spoil of the Savoy, and no more, than you yourself."

"You lie in your throat," he began; but Henry Grindecobbe appearing at this moment dragged Alan away. "Young man, you are not free for your own private quarrels. I am about to hire for you a good horse now at this moment, and you shall ride off to-night to St Albans to tell Deane and Berewick of their sons' case, else be sure they be dead men before Friday morning."

Accordingly Alan rode back to St Albans that night, and came at midnight with his doleful news to Master Deane and Master Berewick. At sun-

rise next morning they went with Master William Grindecobbe to beg the Abbot to intercede for the lives of the two young men, Grindecobbe proposing to remind the Abbot that if he were inclined to deal hardly with them, the allied towns of Herts might take it ill, and return to St Albans to attack the Abbey.

Grindecobbe however, had no need for threats. Nothing could have been milder than the Abbot's demeanour. He seemed to feel only pity for the young men, and anger against Richard Perrers for so officiously getting them condemned. He sighed deeply, cursed his squire, and told the burgesses, as if in friendly confidence, that the over-zeal of his friends was his worst enemy, and that this high-handed action had near undone him, since City hangings were the last things with which he desired to meddle; and he wrote a letter of intercession to the King and sealed it with St Alban's seal. "See, my masters," he said, "the Saint hath no objection to the pardoning of your sons; but when it was a matter of signing that charter on Saturday, he made the seal stick to the wax that I could not draw it away! This is another matter altogether."

The two burgesses went to London that morning to carry the Abbot's letter to the King, but it was not without some difficulty that they were allowed

an interview, and Richard then seemed to be glum and unwilling, though he finally did as he was asked to do. The young men were pardoned on condition that they would go before a justice to have their pardon sealed, and they returned to St Albans sadder and wiser men, pretty well cured of swaggering by their rough experience.

"But as for thee, Alan," said Master Grindecobbe, "I more than half believe that thou art best out of the way, if Richard Perrers be thine enemy. I would that poor Master Piper were yet living and could take thee on his rounds along the roads in Essex as he did before!"

"If I may be spared," said Alan, "I would fain go once more to Faulkbourn to see how my mother fares, for she ailed greatly when she parted with me before the rising, and I have feared ever since that she was not long for this world. If I may have a little silver to buy a few drugs in London on my way, I can ply my calling as I go along the Essex roads, and need be no more expense to any man."

"Very well," said Grindecobbe; "but beware that in Essex thou do nothing which may give men a handle against thee, for it is plain that Richard Perrers bears thee no good will, and it is perilous to have any Perrers for your foe, though perhaps more perilous yet to trust one as your friend."

CHAPTER XIII

ALAN," said Maudlen, coming to him in the hall on the day on which he was to take his journey into Essex, "here is a pouch I have worked for my good foster-mother. Do thou give it to her, with her fosterling's love and prayers. But tell me why thou hast looked so downcast since thy return from London. Is not all going well, now that the Abbot has given us our charters, and there is nothing more to fight for?"

"I hope all may be well here," said Alan: "but, sweetheart, I cannot put from my mind what it has cost, when I think that the Monday before last John Kirkby was at the head of all the thousands of Essexmen, and last Monday I saw his head spiked on London Bridge. It seems to me as if there were nothing certain to be reckoned upon in this world, and that as the wheel goes round it bears us with it, and we cannot help ourselves. Sometimes my soul seems to get dizzy for want of something firm to hold by, but heaven is a long way from earth."

"But there is love to hold by," said the girl ;
"love that will never change."

"Death will sever love," said Alan : "if my head
were off my shoulders like poor Kirkby's, where
would our love be, sweetheart?"

"Why, in our two hearts, surely," said Maudlen,
"dead or alive!"

However uncertain Alan felt of life and fate,
the thought of the tone of Maudlen's fervent words,
and the loving glance of her dark eyes warmed his
heart as he went on his way to visit his mother.
He joined the first honest folk he could meet on
the road for safety's sake, for the roads were more
unsafe than usual owing to the "masterless men"
who formed the scum of the bands of St George,
and who had preferred to loiter about the roads
and pick up spoil from unprotected travellers, rather
than go back to their homes. At Witham, where
he parted from his fellow-travellers, he went into a
tavern to dine, and there he came across two men
he knew—Ralph Rushen and William Bowyer, who
had received letters of manumission at Mile End
among the rest.

"The matter is," said Bowyer, "that we must
needs go up to Mile End once more, to pray the
King to make the lords do his will. My tale is
the tale of all. When I got back to my master,

Sir John Oliver, and showed him my papers, he threw them on the ground and swore at me roundly for a run-away knave. 'Am I,' said he, 'to yield my rights over my bondsmen because a hare-brained babe pleases to give them a parchment, as he might give them a rattle and bells without law or reason? Nay, sirrah, none but Parliament can alter the laws, neither King Richard nor King Edward, even if he were at full age, and not a babe wielding the royal seal. So no more of this folly, but go clean the pigsty, which has grown foul enough while thou and thy mates have been a-rioting in London town!'"

"Then what dost thou here?" said Alan. "Thou goest not alone to seek the ear of the King?"

"Nay, we two are on our way to Billericay where Thomas Scott abides, and whence he shall counsel us how to get justice from our masters. Is the Banner of St George to be wholly contemned, and did we rise for nothing?"

Alan went on to Faulkbourn, and as he went he saw the young moon in the sky, curved like a feather of light. It was sixteen days only since the full moon had called him away, full of high hopes and adventure. Well, the hopes seemed to have been fulfilled, the adventure had come to him in plenty, but it seemed like sixteen years to him

since that evening: the boyish dreamer had developed into the man of action, and the realities had not been as sweet as the dreams. However, when he reached his mother's cottage, all looked much the same as before, except that when the door of the inner room was opened, he saw Agnes Fenn standing by the bedside of his mother, who lay white and wasted on her pillows waiting for death.

"Thou hast come in time to see her die," she said to Alan.

"Mother, mother, dost know me?" said Alan, kneeling down beside her bed.

"My boy Alan," said Pernel Harding, faintly. "Hast thou minded what I bade thee concerning the De Rivers?"

"Yes," said Alan, "I saved young Hugh, and let him go without ransom. Mother, we have won the charters. The King promised all that we required."

"Let him go without ransom? Well done, good lad. I would not have a De Rivers harmed—neither in skin, nor in purse."

"Mother, art thou not glad that our cause is won?"

"The De Rivers have been good to me, Alan. I could not have looked at his mother again if my

son had harmed hers. God Almighty bless thee, dear lad."

The rising, the cause, the charters won seemed now to bear no meaning to the dying ears. She could only think of her own personal gratitude to those who had been good to her. Once more, however, after a pause, she opened her eyes and beckoned him near.

"Some day, Alan, thou wilt be like me. Nought matters then whether we have lost or won what we strove for—only whether we have served God, and stood by them that were oppressed. My good lad will remember that."

She died not long after with Alan's hand in hers, and was buried in Faulkbourn churchyard. Dame de Rivers came to her funeral, as she always did to that of any of her dependents; she was a worthy elderly lady who cultivated her religious emotions, and she always said that it weaned her from the world and reminded her of her own mortality when she attended funerals, whether of rich or poor. When the funeral was over, and Alan was going away heavy-hearted, she called to him, "Young man," she said, "I think thou art Pernel Harding's son?"

"I am, lady," said Alan.

"And I fear thou hast been out in this wicked rising?"

"Lady," said Alan, "it was laid on me by my father when he died that I should side with them that were oppressed."

"Ay, but not to rob and spoil and murder, as these bands of St George have done."

"Master Hugh de Rivers," said Alan with spirit, "could speak for me that spoil and murder lie not in my way."

"Alack, alack," said the Dame, "it is pity that one so young and so well-spoken should thus have been led astray! Remember, young man, it is written that the servant shall obey the master, and the bond the free."

"I am no clerk, good dame," said Alan, "but methought it was written that in the Lord Christ there was no more bond nor free, but all one."

"Alack, alack, I fear thou hast been misled with false teachers. Farewell, young man, and ply thee some honest calling, and meddle not with risings or riots any more."

Alan was somewhat doubtful what to do next when he turned away from Faulkbourn with his pack of drugs upon his back. While he was attending his mother's death-bed he had heard nothing of public matters, and his first step was to make his way to a tavern affected by the St George's men. Here he met with his old friend Friar

Appleton, who knew as well as any man in Essex what was going on, and was quite willing to impart his knowledge to Alan.

"Things be not going the way we could wish," said the Friar. "The lords were unwilling enough to give their bondsmen the liberties granted in the charters before the King's letter came, and since then they are one and all in a mind to refuse."

"The King's letter? What letter?" said Alan.

"I have a copy of it here," said Appleton, "that I got the town-crier to give me when he had read it through, for I was minded that the lords that had not heard of it should not get it into their hands to make them yet more stubborn." And he drew out a parchment, from which he read the following words:—

"Because we are given to understand that sundry of our lieges who have risen and come together in divers meetings and assemblies, perpetrating much damage to our loyal subjects, affirm that they make such a rising by our will and authority; we enjoin and command you that it is publicly to be proclaimed in all places where it may seem good to you, that this rising shall be put down by strong hand and by all your powers, teaching our said lieges that they wholly desist from such assemblies and risings, and that they betake them to their

own homes and there tarry in peace, on pain of forfeiture of life and limb, and all things else which can be forfeited."

"'Tis not like what the King spoke to us at Mile End," said Alan.

"Far from it indeed," said Appleton. "We know not how it can have come about, but we doubt the King has been misled by our enemies. If the letter were dated earlier than last Monday it might seem that it had been put forth to stop the London riots; but all rioting was over before Monday, and that is the date of the letter."

"Something should be done to set before the King that his words are but a dead letter," said Alan. "Why not send up an embassy to him?"

"That is my thought also," said Appleton. "Wilt thou come with me to Billericay, and confer with Thomas Scott there respecting an embassy? Thou wilt be welcome there, for there are few there that can read or write."

Allan went to Billericay with Appleton. When he reached the place he found the Billericay woods made into a sort of Adullam. All the Essex bondsmen who found their charters of manumission disregarded by their lords, and who were not handicapped by the possession of houses, wives and children, gathered at Billericay, and encamped there

under the command of Thomas Scott, who kept them under some kind of rough discipline. They had again come provided with a fortnight's provisions, and when Alan got there, about a week of the fortnight had run out. Alan had been a sufficiently prominent figure in the rising to be well-known by sight to most of the St George's men, and Thomas Scott welcomed him warmly. There were but few men of mark and ability among the fugitives at Billericay, and the peasants clustered round Alan as if he could answer all their doubts.

"Doth King Richard know how his lords despise his commands?" said one.

"Sure, if he knew, he would bid them on their obedience to perform what he orders," said another.

"Such a gallant lad! none can believe he would play us false."

"Ah, he did look fine as he sat his white charger at Mile End."

"'Twas the slaying of the Archbishop that hath brought a curse upon us."

"Aye, it was an evil day when Straw and Starling joined us."

"The curse fell on Starling, and that was good; but why should it fall on us?"

"How did the curse fall on Starling?" said Alan.

"Heardst thou not? He went home after Tiler was slain, and there he went stark staring mad; he went about unclad, with nought but a sword behind and a dagger before, and all he said was 'This is the dagger that drank the Archbishop's blood'; and then in his madness he wandered up to London, and there they took him and hanged him."

"Was it the King that had him hanged?"

"Nay, the Mayor and Corporation—the same that beheaded Straw and Kirkby and Threader."

"Then maybe the King's heart is still toward us. I believe if we could get speech of him once more, he would yet right all our wrongs."

"'Tis true enough what they say," said Thomas Scott. "What sayest thou, Alan Leech? Has the son of Will Harding who was done to death by the Lord of Crix got a brave enough heart to lead the embassy? See, I would go myself, but I may not leave these poor fellows, thy place is here. Wilt thou go to the King?"

"I would not refuse," said Alan, "but if one Dick Perrers of St Albans be with the King I should do more harm than good by leading the embassy. It is to keep out of his way that Master Grindecobbe sent me into Essex."

Thomas Scott was evidently disappointed, though he agreed with Alan that with an enemy at court

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he had better not go, but here Friar Appleton put in his word.

"The King," he said, "lies at Waltham Abbey. "One of our brethren comes to-night from Waltham, and I trust him for finding out who is at the court there. If this Perrers be in London, as he was on Monday by Alan Leech's tale, I see no reason why Alan should not go on the embassy. Send three of us—Alan, myself, and some other. Before we go into the King, I will warrant myself to find out if Perrers be at Waltham or no, and if he be, we will go in without Alan."

"Methinks Alan is but half-hearted about this embassy," said Thomas Scott.

"Nay," said Alan, "but I know not if I am learned enough in the law to make a good messenger. For what William Bowyer told me his master threw in his teeth sticks in mine—that it is the Parliament that makes the laws, and that the King cannot make and unmake them by his own right alone."

"The Parliament!" said Scott scornfully. "Should we ask our masters for our rights against themselves? What chance should we have of redress?"

"I know not," said Alan, "but it seems that one who knows the laws better than I do should deal best with this matter."

"Stay at least to hear what Brother Spragge saith to-night," said Appleton, and Alan agreed. He left the camp, and walked by himself in the June wood, which was now deepening its green to that of later summer.

These three weeks had changed him from boy to man, and he was no longer carried away by the enthusiasm of numbers without understanding to what his actions pledged him. He knew now without being told that if he became messenger to the King from the Billericay fugitives, he would take his life in his hand. The head of John Kirkby on London Bridge had taught him what that meant. All hopes of life—sweet Maudlen Grindecobbe—the young blood in his veins—seemed to revolt against the fate he foresaw he might incur, and he was no longer cocksure, as in old days, that there was but one course to be taken, and that anyone was capable of taking it. And yet—yet, if these poor fellows prayed him to intercede for them to the King, could he be so churlish as to refuse, for regard to his own life?

Alan had not for nothing been brought up in the atmosphere of a man like William Grindecobbe. He had not, of course, the sense of the obligation of nobility, for the son of William Harding had no noble blood in his veins, but the sense of the

obligation of *worth* has at all times, thank God, been equally potent with Englishmen and Englishwomen, and he knew from the first that he could not refuse. But all the same, it was with the cost weighed and counted that he went back to Thomas Scott, and on finding that Friar Spragge had arrived and reported that Perrers was not at Waltham, he said, "I will go if you have no better man, and I will do my best. If I fail it will not be that I have only half a heart in the cause. Meantime, hast thou a priest here who may shrive me, for thou knowest, Master Scott, as well as any, that a man who goes on such an embassy may find his feet lifted off the ground before he has time to look about him."

"It is true," said Scott, who was quite ready to contemplate death for himself and for others in the cause of St George. "There is a worthy priest among us, and I will send him to thee to-night, so that thy soul may be saved if they undo thy body. But things may not come to that."

CHAPTER XIV

KING RICHARD lay at Waltham Abbey, and in those days a royal visit to a country residence, however greatly the neighbourhood might be honoured by the King, was anything but a gratification to its inhabitants. The Plantagenets travelled with trains of men and horses which would to us seem incredible ; they sent in requisitions for food, carts, farm produce, all sorts of domestic necessities, as though they were generals of a conquering army : and the farmers and gentry about Waltham saw their crops carried off, their hay taken off the field to the King's carts instead of being stacked, and their corn, if any early field seemed inclined to change colour before the rest, reaped before it was ripe. However, Richard thought this the course of nature, and went out quite contentedly with his bow and Hugh de Rivers, one of his favourite companions, to shoot rabbits in the Abbot of Waltham's woods. Hugh was three or four years the elder, and as he was

a good steady youth, Richard's friendship for him was looked upon with some favour by his uncles.

The golden flakes of sunshine lay upon the grass glades which made natural paths through the oaks and beeches, and as the two lads reached the boundary of the wood, eight or ten men in gaberdines lifted up their heads and their clasped hands above the quickset hedge, crying altogether, "A boon, my lord, a boon!"

They were plainly suppliants, and had no ill intent: they did not try to break through the hedge, which they knew too well might in the case of an abbot's property have proved to be not only trespass but sacrilege.

"What is it, good men?" said Richard, expecting to be begged of, and feeling in his pouch for some small coins. "Hast any pence about thee, Hugh?"

"My lord and gracious King," said the spokesman of the party, "it is not money we pray for. We pray that you would speak to our lords, who will not obey your commands and respect our manumission, but treat your charters as though they were waste paper. We are of them who had our charters given us of your mercy at Mile End, and now we might as well be without them, for all the good they be."

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 183

It was, in fact, just the same story here at Waltham as Alan Harding had heard from William Bowyer at the Witham tavern, and again from the men at Billericay. The setting free of the villans was in truth a matter for which the country had not been ripe. The holders of power—the nobles and the country gentlemen, the abbots and the greater ecclesiastics generally, were quite determined to keep their bondsmen in bondage: and England under Richard II. was not like Russia under Alexander II., but a country with a sturdy aristocracy, accustomed to do as it chose, and with a voice in the government recognised in Parliament.

“I will see, good fellows, what may be done to help you,” said Richard, and turned away till the wood hid the hedge and the suppliants behind it from his sight. Then he threw himself down on the mossy grass, and pushed his bow away from him like a petulant child.

“See now, good Hugh,” he said, “in how strait a place I stand. There is not a lad of my years in the country, let alone a King of England, that sees himself made such a fool as I. It was ill enough when those uncles of mine left me to disperse the rising as I did: had it not been for me London might have been sacked. But I showed

the rebels I meant them well, and they believed me. Then on Sunday last come my uncles and tell me my crown is lost if I issue not a proclamation to forbid any further risings, and I obey them, though sore against the grain. And now, here come these poor fellows and tell me that my word is disobeyed, and my commands made a laughing stock through the land! But I will not bear with it, and that my uncles shall know."

"Good, my lord," said Hugh, "it needs to go to work very gingerly respecting this matter; for though the bondsmen think it hard that they should not be manumitted when they have the papers thereto, the masters of the bondsmen think it quite as hard that they should have to manumit against the law. If Parliament commanded, matters would stand otherwise."

"Parliament!" said Richard, impatiently; "is my promise to be set at nought because Parliament chooses? I tell thee, Hugh, it is poor work to be a king."

He rose, and followed by Hugh, made his way back to Waltham Abbey. When he arrived there a squire came forward and said, "My lord King, there are certain petitioners come hither from the Essexmen to crave a boon from you: but my lord of Lancaster sends to tell you that he would fain

see you before you speak to them, and will wait upon you at once." And at the same moment John of Gaunt, who had been apprised of Richard's return came into the hall, and said in a tone rather of command than of suggestion, "I have matters for your ear, my lord nephew; may it please you to step aside with me into the Abbot's little parlour." He opened the door of the chamber he spoke of, and followed Richard in.

"I have seen the Essexmen's messengers," said Gaunt. "They come to say that they cannot get their masters to recognise their manumission, these saying that what has been done is against the law, and a matter for Parliament."

"Impudent knaves!" said Richard. "Is my promise then to have no weight?"

"See here, my lord Richard," said his uncle. "This matter has been all a mistake from first to last. Had you been less headstrong, and guided by those that have experience and authority, you had not made the promises you cannot now carry out. If you wish to keep your crown on your head, there must be no more dallying with the bondsmen. It is not the bondsmen that make or unmake the King, but their masters. Nay, lad, there need be no flouting of a man that stands in place of thy father. If I were not true to my

brother Edward's son, I should counsel thee to go on as thou hast begun, knowing that thus England should presently shake thee off thy seat, and put me in thy place. Men are already debating whether John of Gaunt may not prove a better king than a headstrong boy who flouts the law. Now, before thou seest the Essexmen's messengers, make up thy mind to this. Thou canst throw in thy lot with the bondsmen and lose thy crown, or thou canst hold to their masters and keep thy crown on thy head, but thou must choose between one and the other. Take five minutes to choose, and then we will have the Essexmen in for thee to answer."

He was a boy of fifteen, with generous impulses, indeed, but with no formed principles. What could be expected when on one side was the mature judgment of his advisers, and on the other was the loss of his crown, with uncertainty in his mind whether he had not exceeded his rights in befriending the bondsmen? He brushed away angry tears. "What then can I say to them?" he said. "They will throw my promises in my teeth."

"Forget your promises, and rate them for coming at all — the more severely the better. Turn your anger with me upon them, nephew Richard. After all, you are the King, and they

cannot answer you again. Now I will call them. You have a ready tongue, let there be no mistake concerning what you say. Remember how they were to have carried you about, a puppet king, and made you do their will."

Friar Appleton, Alan Harding, and another man named Peter Bungay, were waiting all this while in a court outside the Abbey kitchen, where from time to time the scullions came and stared at them and cracked contemptuous jokes at their appearance. At last they were summoned into the great hall where the King sat on the dais with his uncles on either hand, the council behind him, and his courtiers at the two sides. They fell down on their knees, and Friar Appleton, who had been appointed speaker, having a readier tongue and greater experience than the rest, put forth the grievances for which they prayed the King's redress, how the lords would not respect the charters though sealed with the King's seal, and how the free villans prayed that they might not, like serfs, be subject as before to the Manor courts, but might plead their causes before the courts of the hundreds and shires.

Alan had but little hope from the first. King Richard no longer looked smiling and gracious, as he had done at Mile End, but glum and lowering

—in fact, to use an undignified word of royalty, cross and ill-tempered. The Dukes kept their eyes on him as if, thought Alan, he were a prentice and they his masters. When Appleton ceased, there was a little low talk between the King and his councillors, and then Richard turned round upon the petitioners and spoke loudly and angrily, and this was his speech :

“Vile knaves, loathsome to earth and sea and unworthy to live, would you be made equal to your lords? A halter had been the best answer for you, had you not come as messengers. But we grant you your lives to carry back this answer to your fellows. Serfs you were and serfs you be : in bondage you shall remain, not as before, but much worse. While we live and govern this land we shall labour to keep you down by every means with man and horse, that an example may be made of your offence to all serfs after you, and that men may for ever keep before their eyes the mirror of your misery and curse you for it. But you, the messengers, when you have fulfilled your office, if you choose to come back to us and live in our fidelity and allegiance, you shall be allowed to live. Judge therefore what suits your welfare when you get back to your fellows.”

So saying, Richard turned his back, and the

petitioners were hustled roughly enough, out of the hall, and conducted to the Abbey gate, where they were put out into the road with scant ceremony. Then they looked at each other, but felt too sick at heart even to speak to each other of their reception, for the men of Billericay had yet to be told of what had happened.

"I felt," said Alan, when he told the story afterwards, "as though I wished I had been hanged rather than had to stand before those eager hungry faces and smite down their last hope. It was the worst thing I was ever given to do. Some cursed, some wept, some clenched their fists in silence; one man stretched out both hands to heaven and blasphemed the Almighty Himself. For it did seem to us all as though not only King Richard, but God Almighty had turned his back on His poor lieges. Then half of us or more, having no more hope, resolved to go back to our homes, for there seemed nothing to be gained by further association; but some vowed they would never go back alive to bondage, and would sooner take to the woods and live there as outlaws, with Scott at their head. So we said farewell sadly and parted, and few of those who stayed at Billericay lived to see the woods grow bare when the winter came."

The King's change of front to the Essex bonds-

men was made plain to every one a few days later on. From Waltham the court went to Havering, and thence to Chelmsford, whence he issued a writ which destroyed all the hopes of the other men, who had believed that the King's charters had set them free. In this writ he announced that since the letters of manumission which had been granted had emanated from him without mature deliberation, and tended to the prejudice of the kingdom, and of prelates, nobles, lords, and of the holy Anglican Church, "we therefore revoke, break, erase, and annul the said letters, not willing that any one of any state or condition should have or bear away any privilege whatever from the said letters." The writ went on to hold out hopes that the matter should be brought before Parliament, but that the bondsmen felt to be but cold comfort. They had but little hope in Parliament, which was not the mouthpiece of their views, but that of their masters; and in fact when Parliament met it refused them any redress, and endeavoured to tighten their bonds the more.

So, with his heart full of disappointment, and the harrowing doubt whether indeed there could be a Providence which ruled the affairs of men, Alan Harding returned to St Albans as the only home he knew.

CHAPTER XV

WHEN Alan reached St Albans, he made his way at once to Grindecobbe's house. He knocked at the door, but it was not opened at once, as was the way with the hospitable abode: a servant looked out of an upper window, and being satisfied came down again, and then Maudlen herself appeared to unfasten the latch. Her eyes smiled when she saw Alan, but their rims were reddened, and she looked as if she had known anxiety.

"Father and the lads are out in the town," she said, "but come in and sup. Alan, thou scarce lookst like thyself. Nance, fetch the ox-head pasty and the ale, for I am sure Alan has not had a proper meal for days. Now, Alan, sit thee down and eat; I will tell what has befallen here, and when thou hast eaten, thou shalt tell me what has befallen thee in Essex."

"And what is it that hath befallen here?" said Alan.

"Indeed," said Maudlen, "I fear there is more

ill than good to tell. The Abbot by now has got a great force of soldiers into the Abbey under Sir Hugh Seagrave who abides there, and the men-at-arms go swaggering about the town, so that all we maidens have to keep within doors to be out of their way. One of them caught Mary Manson and chucked her under the chin and kissed her, and her sweetheart saw it, and there was near a fresh outbreak against the Minster. Father will not have me walk in the streets without him, not even to Gaffer Luckin's to buy a sprig of parsley! And the last few towns that have gone for their charters to the Abbot have had them refused: and the lawyers say that our rights will not hold in law, for that the King's letter wherein he promised forgiveness for past tumults was dated Friday, and we made our tumult on the Saturday."

"But," said Alan, "we were but asking of the Abbot the very matters which the King's letter under his seal commanded him to give."

"I know," said Maudlen, "but that is what the lawyers say!"

"I would that Wat Tiler had had his way, and all the lawyers in the land had been hanged!" said Alan.

"Hush," said Maudlen, looking at the open case-ment, which she rose at once to shut. "If thou

“speak so loud, Alan, someone may hear in the street. For we know we are watched—there are spies of the Abbot’s who watch this house, and Master Cadyndon and Master Barber. ’Tis that Perrers sets them to work.”

“Is he back here?” said Alan.

“Ay, he and three others whom the Abbot hath also made his squires, Chival, Eydon and Eccleshall. They ride up and down the town as though it were theirs. But now tell me of thy travels.”

Alan told her of all his adventures : his mother’s death, his visit to Billericay, his embassy to Waltham and his return to Billericay with the news of the failure of the messengers. “Our Essexmen’s freedom had been given with one hand and taken away with the other,” he said, “and truly I know not now whether to hope or to fear for this town.”

“Father hopes still,” said Maudlen. “Good luck! here he comes.” She ran to the door, opened it, and came in with her father’s arm over her shoulders. Grindecobbe walked wearily, and looked, so Alan thought, ten years older than before the rising : he sat down in the great chair and after hearing Alan’s story, he said, “Well, Alan lad, our troubles also are not at an end. The King has threatened to come down in force, and, as I hear, in no good disposition towards us ; but the knights and gentlemen of the

country are in no mind to be eaten out of house and home by a royal visit, and they have prayed the King that instead of coming himself, he should send a messenger to enquire into the St Albans tumults, and I hear that this is likely to be done, and that the knight commissioner will be Sir Walter Atte Lee."

"What will he do?" said Alan.

"If we knew, we might act the better," said Grindecobbe. "Many are terrified out of their wits, having heard rumours of the King's roughness to the messengers at Waltham, and some of the burgesses are already packing their goods to fly from the town till the blast blows over. I was urged again by one and the other to do the same, but I spoke against it with might and main. I told them that we of St Albans town were no rioters but orderly citizens, and though we have moved for the restoration of our liberties, we have done so by lawful means under the King's own seal by letter granted to us. I said it is not meet that we should demand our liberties when we are strong, and then run away and hide when we should stand to them in the face of the world like little wanton boys who knock at the doors and then run. Far from flying before Sir Walter and his commission, I bade them welcome it, since the more our demands

were searched into, the more their righteousness would be manifested. So I urged the burgesses to ride out and meet the knight and bring him into St Albans with all honour, in proof that we be not ashamed of the part we have played, but stand to it in open day that we have done nothing that is not becoming to true and loyal commons of the King. Well, they came round to my view, and as soon as we hear what time Sir Walter will arrive, we shall ride out in procession to bring him into the town. I must hire thee a beast to ride on, Alan, to increase our following, for if we be but few, we shall be a laughing-stock."

"Will you all be armed, father?" said Maudlen anxiously.

"Nay, my little faint-heart; we ride not armed to meet the King's commissioners. Cheer up, Maudlen! The odds be not all against us, my pretty. We have wealth and honest hearts enough ready to pour it out to buy our freedom; we have thirty towns and villages in league with us; and as I said at the Moot Hall but now, if we find the knight's intentions be not honest and peaceful, we are still strong enough to whip him out of the town."

Tears still stood on Maudlen's eyelashes.

"Who has been frightening my sweetheart?" said

her father. "Some young spark with his heart on the Abbot's side?"

"As if I should hearken to one word from any young spark on the Abbot's side!" said Maudlen, flushing indignantly. "There is never a maid in the town that would demean herself so low. It is what Master Martin told his wife and Alice that has frightened me. He says that because the Abbey is of the King's patronage, he will take sides against us, and so will his commissioner, and count all the Abbot's enemies as his."

"That may be," said Grindecobbe, "though I bear no enmity to the Abbot. But, sweetheart, thou must pluck up a braver spirit. There are times when men have to live not for themselves only, but for their children and their children's children, and I would not save my skin if for that I should cause that some day the children that will gather round my little maid when her hair is white, had cause to say, 'Our gaffer well-nigh won our freedom, but because he feared to stand for our rights, we are still bond.'"

And as Maudlen looked as if the freedom of her future children still concerned her less than the safety of her present father, he kissed her brow under its dark rings of hair, and said, "Thou wouldst have thy father worthy, sweet, whether living or

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 197

dead, or prisoned or free. Let us all think what deeds may be worthy, rather than what they may bring on our heads."

On June 29, the feast of St Peter and St Paul, a great procession of the townsmen rode out upon the London road to meet Sir Walter Atte Lee. Every owner of a house who could sit in the saddle was pressed into the service of the procession ; and the young Grindecobbes were full of merriment at the sight of some of the riders who had apparently never been on horseback before. Even Alan, whose naturally bright and mirthful face had lately taken a sad and grave expression when he was not speaking, shook his sides with laughter when one Peter Spinks, having unwarily attempted to ride with spurs, found his horse carrying him against his will in among the most worshipful of the burgesses, who rode in front. The procession waited for Sir Walter at about the same spot where Hal and Alan had watched for the coming of Richard of Wallingford with the King's letter. But whereas that day had been bright and breezy, this was hot and misty, with a grey sky and a thundery haze, and the commissioners were no very gay sight, as they rode with drooping banners which there was no wind to wave. Sir Walter Atte Lee rode in the midst, with Sir Edward Benstude and Sir Alfred Stuckley on

198 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

either hand ; these were, like himself, gentlemen of Herts ; and behind followed fifty lances, and two or three hundred Herts bowmen. With one consent the burgesses fell back so as to leave the burden of the performance upon Grindecobbe. They were not invariably his adorers ; some had been heard to talk of "yon meddling knave Grindecobbe," and to wish that he would grind his own cobs and leave them alone. But where there was a post of any danger, it was always assigned to him without further ado.

He came forward to greet Sir Walter with bared head, and made him a speech of conventional welcome, which was answered in fitting manner by the knight, and the two rode side by side into the town, passing courteous and unimportant remarks about the thundery weather and the harvest prospects, but without a word on the real business of the visit. By Sir Walter's own desire, he rode first to the market-place, where as many of the townsmen as had not accompanied the procession were waiting to see how matters might turn out ; and there he courteously begged that Master Grindecobbe would have it proclaimed that he invited all men to meet him in the great meadow outside Derfold Wood, at nine o'clock the next day, when he would speak to them of the matters which he was called upon

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 199

to decide. Then he bowed again to everyone with great courtesy, and he and his men withdrew to the Abbey, where they were to be entertained during their stay at St Albans, while the burgesses remained behind to discuss the situation.

The summer morning broke bright and fair, and by nine o'clock all St Albans was assembled in the field before Derfold Wood. Sir Walter Atte Lee had already taken up his position in the shade of the trees which backed the field, flanked by his lances, and his bowmen spread out on either side, but the townsmen who faced him had the sun in their eyes, so that even if they had thought of attacking him, they could not have seen to shoot. Then, moving his horse a little forward, he delivered the following speech :—

“Good my masters and worthy friends,” said he, “before I begin my dealings with you, I would fain tell you why I come. You know that all over this realm of England there have been disturbances of the King’s peace, whereby his Grace is greatly offended. For which cause he is now administering justice in Essex, holding great judgments and a heavy hand over that county and its inhabitants, and making far heavier than before the bonds which they had tried to throw off. The King, hearing of the disturbances and injuries done in this town and

to this Minster, whose patron he is, burning to be avenged on the transgressors, desired to come hither in person with his whole army, and if he had come he would have consumed every ear of corn and every blade of grass in the fields, for his army is so great that for five miles round Waltham you cannot see a straw, nor a blade of grass, nor a plant of kale, but all is eaten bare. I, being unwilling to bring a like damage upon my own county, sought to turn away the King's intention of coming, by taking, if I might, the weight upon my own shoulders, and with me are joined in this commission no strangers, but your own neighbours and friends, the good knights Benstude and Stuckley. Do therefore what is expedient, and satisfy the good Abbot, whom you will find reasonable enough, seeing he is a just and holy man, and you shall recover the goodwill both of his Grace the King and of the holy Abbot of St Albans."

These words were mostly received in silence: a few half-hearted cheers arose, but even those who cheered were afraid of the knight on one side and of their own townsfolk on the other. But his remarks about the danger to their purses of a visit from the King went home to them, and there was evidently a stir among the people, when the knight spoke again and asked who would come over to his

side and let him know that the King had friends he might count upon to carry out his will. Then there was not only a general cry "We be all of us the King's friends and loyal lieges," but some few of the burgesses moved over to Sir Walter's party. Most, however, remained without moving, and Grindecobbe was in their midst.

Sir Walter shook hands with the burgesses who came over to him, and ignored those who made no sign. He and Benstude and Stuckley at once began to consult with those who had joined him how he should empanel a jury of villans, and charged them to prepare and give up to him the names of those who were guilty of leading the tumults against the Abbey. Then he broke up the meeting and rode off in good order at the head of his men, the townsmen following in groups behind them, until the great gate of the Abbey swallowed them up and they were seen no more.

CHAPTER XVI

ALL that day St Albans town hummed like a beehive when the bees are going to swarm. Every man stood at his shop door instead of attending to his business. The burgesses who had been sworn in to the jury came round to Grindecobbe's house and explained to him that though they had thought it best to make no objection to being sworn, yet he need not fear that they should indict him or any other, for they had made up their minds to say that no such thing as a guilty or disloyal person was to be found in all the town. The Barnet and Watford men (who the townsmen hoped had departed for good and all) came swarming into the streets in groups, with the air of indispensable allies who held the key of the position. The young Grindecobbes could hardly keep their tongues quiet when Master Austin of Barnet came to the door of their house, and standing in the street, waved his cap, shouting "Hold on, good gossip Grindecobbe : yield not an inch to the Commissioner. They

would fain withdraw from us the gift the King himself gave us, but possession is nine points of the law, and what we hold, by St George, we will keep!"

"Come in, Master Austin," said Grindecobbe drily: "the street is not the best place to discuss our matters."

Austin came in, still talking at full pitch of his voice. "We shall be in force outside this to-morrow, and should he make any new attempt, we shall be strong enough to seize him in custody. There are not twenty of his bowmen who would stand by him at a pinch. The others are Herts men, and will come over to us whenever we give the sign. Give the word, Master Grindecobbe, and Barnet will yet hold St Albans and lay the proud Abbot low!"

"St Albans returns thanks to Barnet," said Grindecobbe, "but the word she gives at present is *Wait*. Whatever you do, Master Austin, keep your men in hand, for any new rioting just now would tie our hands and make us helpless to deal with the Commissioners."

Austin went out, still talking as if the whole of the rising were bound up with Barnet—which after all was the first Herts town to give in to the Abbot; and Maudlen said with a sigh of relief,

"Oh, what a windbag! I am glad he has gone. Surely, father, a man like that is no help."

"Sons," said Grindecobbe, "and thou also, Alan Harding, who art all but a son—mind this. If these hot-heads raise up riots in the town, be not any of you led away to join them. All that we have yet done we have done by law and in the name of law; and I pray that none of mine may have it said of them in truth, as men say falsely of me, that they riot and break the law. For except in law there is no salvation, either for a man or a borough or a realm."

Early next morning Sir Walter went round to the burgesses who had been sworn in for the jury, and desired them to come to speak with him at his chamber in the Abbey, before the hour for Mass. They came and stood in his room at the foot of his table while he sat at the head, and gravely inquired of them whom they had indicted. Master Martin, the foreman of the jury, came forward as spokesman for the rest.

"Sir Knight," he said, "we have well considered the matter, as being bound by our oaths, and we have indicted no man. For all the burgesses and good people of St Albans are good and faithful subjects to the King, and we know of none among them that are otherwise."

Sir Walter frowned and said nothing, but wrote on the paper before him without remark. They stood in silence before him until the great bell of the Abbey began to ring, and then he said, "It will be well that you should come into the church and hear mass with me, and perhaps by the grace of heaven better thoughts may then be put into your minds." They followed him into the church and heard mass, and when it was over, he brought them again into his room. "Now, my worthy friends," he said, "a word to you as to wise men. The King wishes to punish the guilty, but he desires even more that the charters extorted from the Abbot should be given back. If you will come back to me at nine o'clock bearing the charters with you, I can promise that the King will be lenient enough with this good town of St Albans, and no small good," he added softly, "shall come of it to you."

The burgesses looked at one another, but being discreet men asked time to consider what they should do; and Sir Walter dismissed them with a severe word of warning that upon them depended the weal and woe of the town. They went immediately to Grindecobbe's house to discuss the situation. Cadynndon and Barber were there already. All were of one mind as to the charters. What

had been won with so much labour and difficulty, and granted under the King's own seal, could not be yielded so tamely.

"But what shall we do?" said Martin, "if Sir Walter sends his men-at-arms to the Moot Hall to rifle the chests there wherein the charters are kept?"

"We will hinder that," said Barber. "The charters shall be removed and hidden in a place known only to us three, and ye can say with truth that you know not where they are kept. Let us stand firm, my masters, in this matter. We hold out not for ourselves, but for our children to all generations to come, whom we may not deprive of their liberty unless we ourselves be cravens."

The burgesses appeared again before Sir Walter in a very unyielding mood. They assured him that they could not give up the charters for two unanswerable reasons; first, that they did not know where the charters were, they being kept in a secret place unknown to them; and secondly, that the commons would kill them if they gave them up. To Sir Walter the first reason was childish and the second cowardly, and he rated them as people could rate their political inferiors in those days, with very little regard either to courtesy or moderation. Then he sent them into a room opening out of

the guest-chamber, which he imagined gave them a way of exit, but as the door was locked at the further end, they thought he intended to imprison them, and called from the window to a brother passing in the court below to demand speech with the Abbot. Up came the Abbot, polite and apologetic, assuring them that no ill was intended them, and leading them to the knight he said, "Sir Walter, I trust these honest burgesses of this our good town, and indeed between myself and them no mediator is necessary." But in spite of this sudden sweetness, the burgesses said one to another as they went out of the Abbey, "His words are smother than butter, having war in his heart." They did not trust Thomas de la Mare.

Sir Walter's next move was to request the burgesses to proclaim another meeting that evening at Barnet Wood, some little way out of St Albans. But if he hoped to hold the meeting without the Barnet allies he was much mistaken, for the Barnet men swore that they would be there, and that the Berkhamstead men should join them, and when Sir Walter reached the wood, he found three hundred archers from Berkhamstead and Barnet all in order, looking as if they meant mischief. It was also rumoured among the crowd that if any hostile movement should be made

against the townsmen by the Commissioner, the Herts men would join their kith and kin of the town ; and many stout words were spoken, which, alas, had to be unsaid not many days after.

The Knight Commissioner saw at once that not much could be done at this meeting ; and indeed it is probable that he never meant to do much, but called it merely as a means of carrying out the plans, which he had secretly contrived, to get hold of the persons of his opponents. He spoke not unkindly to the assembled crowd, advising them for their own sakes to satisfy the Abbot and give up the charters, and having made his speech, he departed, and the meeting broke up. The Barnet and Berkhamstead men waited to consult with Cadyndon, Barber and Grindecobbe, and Grindecobbe's sons, with Alan, stayed behind to ride back with their father.

"Perrers was not here to-day," said Alan to Jack Grindecobbe. "Can he have been sent off to the King?"

"Maybe," said Jack Grindecobbe, "his heady ways have got him into trouble with the Abbot at last, and they have sent him away in disgrace, as one that keeps the town and the Abbey from coming to an understanding."

"Whatever he does, be sure it is mischief," said

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 209

Alan, whose words were only too soon to prove truer than he knew.

"Perhaps he cares not to face the bands of St George when armed with weapons," laughed Hal. "He ever slunk out of a fair fight."

Perrers, whether coward or not, had not been idle while the meeting was going on. He had sent messengers in the Knight Commissioner's name to the bailiffs and constables of the town, bidding them to meet him at a given place outside the city, and there he and the other squires of the Abbot, and their followers, came and issued their commands, supported by both threats and promises, till the bewildered officials thought they had nothing to do but to obey. Perrers had the magnetic power of sway which had practically made his worthless aunt, Alice Perrers, ruler of England in Edward III.'s time; in this case he had determined to conquer the townsmen whom he hated, and he was perfectly unscrupulous as to the means employed.

So it was that as Grindecobbe and his party were riding leisurely homeward through the pleasant grass-bordered roads and leafy lanes, the three leaders of the townsmen riding together and the four youths behind, a troop dashed upon them from under the shadow of a clump of beech-trees, and before they could make any preparations for

defence, they were surrounded, and a man-at-arms at the bridle of each of their horses. Then came forward old Constable Friar, and said in what they then called an "old puling voice," quaking and quivering with age and nervousness, "Good Master Grindecobbe, and masters all, I arrest you in the King's name! It is no fault of mine, Master Grindecobbe—nay Master Barber, I would not have done it of my own mind, but when it is the King's order, what else could I do!"

"Get out of the way, old fool, now thou hast said thy say," said Perrers, roughly pushing him aside, and the old man stood under a tree and burst into tears.

"Master Perrers," said Grindecobbe, "we are taken by surprise and out-numbered, and have no means to resist you. But you have nought against these young men. My three sons here, and this young man (he signed towards Alan) have done nought for which they should be taken."

"They can say that at their trial an they will," said Perrers, "though I doubt he"—and he pointed to Alan—"will have much ado to make the judge hold him scathless, seeing he is well known as a notorious rebel among the Essexmen. Tie their legs beneath their horses' bellies, constables, every man Jack of them, and we will have them safe in

the Abbey jail before the sun is down. Eh, my masters, you did not think it would so soon be your turn when you foully broke in there the other day and released the Abbot's prisoners!"

The captives rode on, ill at ease in their bodies, but even less comfortable in their minds, though one and all scorned to show any trouble in their faces. Perrers led his troop round to the Abbey gate, and there they were all dismounted and led into the turnkeys' chamber to the right of the gateway. In that chamber was a trap-door, with a grating in it, which on being opened disclosed a rude ladder-like stair; down this stair the prisoners were thrust, and as each reached the bottom they were seized by two of the Abbot's men and loaded with heavy leg-fetters. When all had been fettered, they found themselves lying side by side on the stone floor in total darkness. They could not see one another's faces, nor indeed anything else, for the grating over the staircase admitted little light at full noon, and it was now evening. The Abbot's dungeon was a dungeon indeed.

Before long the turnkey came down the stair with a lantern, followed by another with loaves of bread and a pitcher of water. The lantern-bearer thrust it into the prisoners' faces, making them start and blink, chuckling as he did so.

212 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

"You thought you were driving a fine trade t'other day, my masters," said he, "when you bade me bring out the Abbot's prisoners. But it was not your folks' command I obeyed, Master Grindecobbe, 'twas the Abbot's; what think you of that, now?"

"That 'twas a good deed the Abbot commanded," said Jack Grindecobbe.

"He cared not a jot, not he, whether or no he emptied his dungeon of the spawn that it held. He knew bigger fish would come in afore long. We will bow our heads to the storm, quoth he, until this iniquity be over-past, and be sure we shall win in the end: and here you be, caught in his net, ho! ho!"

"If thou hold thy peace, fellow," said Grindecobbe, "and instead of wasting thy breath get me speech of my brothers in the Abbey, it were better for thy pouch."

"Brothers may do many things for a man, but not open this dungeon door," chuckled the turnkey. However, he went as he was bidden, and before long Brother John Grindecobbe stumbled down the dark staircase.

"I ever warned thee how it would be, brother Will," he said, shaking his head, "and now I can do nothing."

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 213

"Thou canst do much," said Grindecobbe. "Here be thy three nephews and Alan Harding, who were taken by error in our company : there can be no writ out against them : get them out of this ill-smelling hole, and thou wilt have done thy kin a good turn."

John Grindecobbe consented to see what could be done, and before long he returned.

"My nephews," he said, "may go, on condition they abide to-night with me in the Abbey, but as for Alan Leech, who has been out with the Essex rebels within the last week, the Abbot saith that as he sows he must reap, and there is no favour to be shown for him."

Grindecobbe put out his unfettered hand and laid it on Alan's shoulder. "Never fear, lad," he said, "the luck may turn yet. Sons, help me to my feet that I may give you my blessing, if so be that I set eyes on you no more, for shrifts be short in these days. And give my blessing and her father's dear love to sweetheart Maudlen, and say to her that I trust she will never wed but a brave man who loves the commons and seeks to help the oppressed. And do you remember all your lives that though I have many sins whereof I need to be shriven in all my past life, yet I count it no sin that I have striven with the Abbey for my townsmen's rights."

By this time the turnkey had unlocked the lads' fetters and they knelt down before their father, who laid his hand upon the head of each in turn, and blessed him solemnly. They went out weeping, and Grindecobbe turned to Alan and said, "I would I could have set thee free too, lad. But be of good cheer, for better men than we have lain in prison for a good cause before this."

"I grudge not to share your fate, master, whatever it be," said Alan.

CHAPTER XVII

THE dawn had not yet found its way to the dungeon grating when the jailer came down and woke the prisoners from their uneasy sleep, telling them that they were to ride at once to Hertford jail before the town was up. They were brought out and set upon horses, with their legs tied as before, and then they were taken through the Abbey gate into the wood, where a troop of people awaited them. Perrers and the other squires, with their men-at-arms, Sir Walter's lances, and five or six of the chief burgesses of the town, Master Martin and Master Deane among them—those who had moved over to Sir Walter at Derfold Wood, in answer to his query who were on the King's side. Perrers would not allow the burgesses to make any communication to Grindecobbe, Barber, or Cadyndon: but Alan, who rode behind, was less strictly guarded, and in the course of the ride he was so near Martin that the latter was able to say, "Hist, Alan Harding. Take this word to William

216 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

Grindecobbe. Tell him it is for no ill-will to him or the others that we are here to-day, but because we could not help ourselves: and tell him that all the burgesses watch with might and main for a chance to befriend him, or to let him out on bail."

He said no more, and Alan could not give the message until the prisoners were locked up in Hertford jail, eating a prison meal for which the burgesses paid, as Alan had no money. Grindecobbe nodded, not very hopefully, and the meal was not done when word came that they were all four to be tried at once in the court-house under Judge Brewster, who was at that time sitting on the county assize. The fetters were unlocked from their feet, and as they went into the court Alan said to Grindecobbe, "What leanings hath this judge that is to try us?"

He shook his head and said, "There is another Judge above him," and at that Alan knew that there was but little hope for them. They were all four put into the dock together, and their trial began.

Richard Perrers prosecuted on the part of the King and the Abbot. He was eager and enthusiastic, ready of speech, and absolutely pitiless, for in those days men's lives were but counters in a

game; few men thought of sparing their opponents; and the only redeeming point was that they thought it quite as natural to be hanged, if they were the worsted side, as to hang others if they won the game. Alan listened at first to his invective, and wondered with a half smile how he and all his friends could have been such vile wretches and never known it till now: then his thoughts wandered off to Maudlen Grindecobbe pacing to and fro at her spinning wheel in her white coif, and he wondered whether she were praying for her father and him, and if so, which church she had gone to pray in. Then he heard Perrers' voice going on and on. "My Lord Judge, can any more loathly traitor live in this realm than this William Grindecobbe, who first impudently extorts letters from our lord the King against the holy Abbot of St Alban, his spiritual father, which is worse than a parricide, and then heads a multitude of robbers and murderers and leads them on to burn the Abbey, a thing not attempted by Brutus, or Cassius, or Judas Iscariot himself. Therefore, my Lord Judge, I submit that no punishment can be too great for so execrable a villain——"

His peroration, however, was interrupted by a stir in court, and one of the officials announced "A

218 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

letter from my lord the Abbot to Master Perrers." He opened and read it, stamped his foot and swore a great oath, and spoke to the other squires who were close beside him. Controlling himself with an effort, he said to the judge, "My lord, the Abbot sends word that grave peril has arisen at St Albans which demands my presence there at once, wherefore I pray that these evil traitors may be kept in all safety till I may return and see them condemned to the punishment they deserve." And he and the other squires, looking black enough at the interruption of their game, left the court-house, and the prisoners were respited for the time. All of them knew that if Perrers had stayed, they would not have seen the sun set that evening.

The cause of this sudden recall was that the news of Grindecobbe's arrest had aroused such a passion of indignation in the town that the Abbot was seriously alarmed for the safety of the Abbey, accidentally almost denuded of defenders. Though he had sent to the country gentlemen round to come to his defence, he was not sure how long it would be before they came, and accordingly, he hurried back his squires and their men-at-arms from Hertford, much to their disgust.

The prosecutor being away, the judge and the lawyers looked at one another doubtful as to what

was to be done next, and the burgesses now took their opportunity, and offered to stand bail for the prisoners. There was considerable discussion, and at last the judge turned to the prisoners, and told them that their fellow-townsmen had offered bail for them, but by reason of their frightful crimes against the Abbot he could not accept the offer. "Yet it hath been represented to me that William Grindecobbe, having great influence with the people of St Albans and the men of Herts, might work upon them to come to terms with the Abbot, in which case his life and the life of all the other prisoners might be spared. Wherefore I am willing to accept bail for him to the amount of three hundred pounds, under the bargain that if such agreement be not made before Saturday next, he shall return hither to prison and ye will all doubtless suffer the due reward of your deeds. Go back to your prison, and your friends shall have access to you and see if you be willing to agree to these terms."

The jail at Hertford was not so dark as the Abbot's dungeon, and while the other prisoners were again being fettered, they could see Grindecobbe and the other burgesses in earnest conversation. When the turnkey left them, they all came together and discussed the matter.

"Good gossips," said Grindecobbe, "if I be to promise to urge the town to submit to the Abbot, I shall promise what I cannot perform. How could I do that without confessing myself knave and coward? and life is not worth shame. I cannot go against all the work of my life, and I thank God I do not fear to die."

"Good brother," said Deane, "it is not thy life only that is at stake, but that of these good men and true who will die also, if thou persist in thy stubbornness."

"We are not less willing to die in a good cause than thou, Will Grindecobbe," said Cadyndon, "not even young Alan here," and Grindecobbe smiled at Alan as much as to say he knew it already. "But none the less, my word is that thou accept our friends' bail, and take the privilege of freedom until Saturday. For who can tell what day to day may bring forth?"

"Aye," said Barber, "something may happen, whereby a man may have occasion to bargain both for your life and ours, and that without giving up the charters, or doing anything unworthy of the freedom we have won."

"We would not have that done for our lives," said Cadyndon: "if thou go out on this bail, and aught happens that thou canst better our state

without yielding our freedom, take the chance, but if nought so happens, then if thou return on Saturday we are none the worse than before, nay rather better, because we have this week's respite. They will not hang us while thou art out on bail."

"Then I will consent," said Grindecobbe, "though as things be now I see not much hope for any of our lives. Let us keep up a stout heart and a godly mind, for they are good whether for death or life." And he embraced his friends, saying when he came to Alan, "My lad, I would I could have got thee out of this, but I fear there is but little hope, and I must not barter the liberties of the town for my life or thine."

"No, master," said Alan, "nor would I have it so. I can die as well as another."

"And hast thou any word to send to Maudlen?" said Grindecobbe. Alan started and coloured hotly, but his master was looking at him with kind grave eyes in which there was no blame. "My faithful love," he said, "and God bless her!" And then, poor fellow, he turned round and lay on his face, hiding his tears, while Grindecobbe went out into the daylight.

He rode home with Deane and Martin, and when Maudlen opened the door and saw him standing

there she could hardly believe her eyes. "O father, father, art really free?" she said as she fell upon his neck and kissed him again and again. "And where is Alan?"

"Dear heart," he said very gently, "I am only out on bail till Saturday, and Alan is yet in jail at Hertford, whither I doubt I shall have to return to my death. As for Alan he sent thee his faithful love and blessing. Aye, child, I saw where thy heart was, and knowing the youth's worth, I forbore to say anything against your coming together, hoping to see my way to put him in some post where in time he might have wedded my Maudlen, but now all our private hopes be drowned in our public troubles." And he went on talking gently to her till she dried her tears, so as to distress him the less, for Maudlen was her father's own daughter, and could be strong, when need came, against herself.

"And see here," he said at last. "As thou art my own good maid, I pray that thou weary me not with prayers to yield to the Abbot's friends in any matter that may hurt the town. For the love of life is strong enough in a man's heart to urge him to save his skin by any means, without adding to it the tears and prayers of the womankind he loves."

"But Alan—" said Maudlen.

"Alan holds with me. He is young, and life is strong in him, but he is stout of heart, and more willing to die for the cause than to be saved by any baseness of mine."

"Then I will be stout of heart too, for I would not be unworthy of you both," said Maudlen, white-faced but tearless. And at whatever cost to herself, as far as her father was concerned, the girl kept her word.

Next day—Wednesday—Grindecobbe went to the Moot Hall, where all St Albans was assembled to meet him, and it was plain that it was not to the liking of everyone that he was there at all. Many of the burgesses were much discomposed about the matter. "Three hundred pounds of bail is a heavy sum for the town to stand to," they said. "He is certain of death if he return to jail, and what is to hinder him from showing a clean pair of heels and leaving us in the lurch? He has money of his own bestowed in other places than this town, what is to hinder his escaping to his brother the dyer in London, and being hidden there or sent over seas? He will do that, be sure, and leave us to pay the piper and face the Abbot."

Grindecobbe had hints of these fears from many quarters, but they did not survive the moment when he stood up before them and made his historic

speech, which even Brother Walsingham was fain to admire and record, though he prefaces it with the statement that Grindecobbe's heart was "now indurated in evil." The speaker's face was calm and steadfast, as one who has weighed life and death, and chosen death with his free will.

"Good people all, and fellow-townsmen, I have but a few words to say to you, but those I say with my whole heart, as one who has done with life. We have won a measure of liberty, and the burden of daily oppression is lifted off from us. Be strong and steadfast to keep what we have gained : stand fast while you may, and fear not any loss to be brought upon you by me. For if I now die, I die in the cause of the freedom we have won, thinking myself happy to end my life by a martyrdom so glorious. Now nothing could have stayed them but they would have made an end of me yesterday at Hertford, if the Abbot had not so hastily recalled his squires ; for they were moving heaven and earth to get me condemned, bringing all manner of accusations against me, and withal they had the judge on their side, as eager to sentence me as they to convict me. Therefore my word to you is this : Do that, and nothing else, which you would have done had I been slain yesterday at Hertford. My life matters little, but your freedom is worth the

death of many men, so hold fast what you have won."

Then came a great shout of applause and cheers, not unmingled with the sound of weeping, and all men vowed that they would hold by their freedom as he bade, and that the charters should not be surrendered.

William Grindecobbe, after this, remained quietly in his own house, making such final arrangements as were necessary respecting his property and his family. He did not wish to have met the people again, being as he said, anxious to prepare for death and make a good end. Maudlen, poor child, clung to the belief that her uncle the dyer, who had gone into Essex to beg the King to spare her father's life, might even now be successful, but few others had much hope in the matter.

As the inexorable days went on, however, the wrath and indignation of the people of St Albans increased beyond bounds, and on the Friday they came together in the market-place, reinforced once more by men from Barnet and Berkhamstead and Watford, and clamoured that Grindecobbe should put himself at their head, and lead them against the Abbey where they might take Sir Walter Atte Lee, cut off his head and set it upon the pillory, to the terror of all judges and false justiciaries and

King's Commissioners. When the tumult was at the highest, Grindecobbe himself, who had been sent for by the burgesses, came forward and stood on the steps of the Moot Hall.

"Good people," he said, "I know your goodness to me, that you would fain save my life, but indeed it is not thus to be saved. What we did before, we did lawfully, for our just rights, and under seal from the King himself. What you pray me now to do would be lawless violence, which would bring upon our heads the wrath not only of the King, but of a greater—even the King's Son of Heaven. No good could come from it in the end, either in this world or the next, but much evil, both to us and to the innocent in this town. I will not lead you against the Abbey. Nay, if you hold that I have deserved well of you, good friends, go home peaceably, and do nothing against the law for me or for yourselves."

Such was Grindecobbe's power over them that they began to disperse and at the same moment a letter was put into Grindecobbe's hands. The people at once took it into their heads that it was a reprieve or a pardon, and began to cheer. Grindecobbe came forward again and all rushed within hearing distance. "He is pardoned—he is pardoned after all!" they had begun to say, but

Grindecobbe's voice soon rose, clear and steady as usual.

"I have heard heavy news," he said, "from my brother. He went to Chelmsford to intercede for me, but he can get no audience from the King, who is ill-disposed towards me."

A groan arose from the crowd.

"Nay, good people, that is not the worst," said Grindecobbe. "My brother tells me that our poor bands in Essex have been grievously cut to pieces by Lord Thomas Percy and my Lord of Woodstock. Some fled from Billericay to Colchester, and there made a stand ; but there my Lord Fitzwalter and Sir John Harleston came against them, and pursued them even to Sudbury. And now this same Lord Thomas Percy, with my Lord of Warwick, is on his march hither, and if you saved my life for the moment, it would only bring later a heavier punishment upon the town. Go home then, and give no more cause of offence than we have already given ; and as for me, I bid you farewell, and pray you of your charity to pray for my soul, as a true lover of this town, and one that has sought your good as best I might."

On Saturday, July 5, Grindecobbe was brought back to Hertford jail by Deane and Martin, who parted from him with much grief and many tears.

228 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

"Now that is over," he said as he stretched out his fettered feet upon the straw, "I have been able to help none of you, good friends, nor myself neither. Let us make our peace with Heaven, for God is our best Friend."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE young Grindecobbes stood or sat together in the hall when their father had gone to prison, hopeless and helpless. They had nowhere to go and nothing to do, and when Jack Grindecobbe said, "We got no such boon after all when Uncle John let us out of the Abbot's dungeon," the others echoed the feeling in their hearts.

Suddenly Maudlen came in. Her face had grown small and white with the strain of the last week, but there was purpose in it, and her eyes were tearless.

"Which of my brothers," she said, "will carry me to Uncle Henry Grindecobbe at Chelmsford?"

"None of us," said Will. "This is no time for an honest woman to be on the roads. Thou must wait till he gets back to London, then we will take thee there, as father bade us do."

"Listen," said Maudlen. "I have seen the messenger our uncle sent from Chelmsford, and I have been speaking with him. He says that Master

Hugh de Rivers is there with the King, and high in the King's favour."

"And who is Hugh de Rivers?" said Jack.

"He is the man Alan saved and let go free without ransom; and he promised to Alan that if he were in trouble he would help him. It has come to my mind that we might go and appeal to him for Alan's life, and then, maybe, he might get us an audience of the King, to plead for father also."

"We might do that, Jack—thou and I," said Hal. "There is some sense in her words. Perhaps Uncle Henry would get us in to see him."

"What should we say?" said Jack. "Thou and I can speak well enough, and loud enough, in the market-place, but we have never learnt to mince our words for courts, where for aught I know, they may expect us to talk French."

"Yet," said Hal, "if there be a chance for Alan, who has been a good brother to us all, we ought to try; and as Maudlen says, if we got a word with this Hugh, he might help us to the King to speak for father."

"Who would do the speaking?" said Will, who was never inclined to use his tongue more than needful.

"Uncle Henry might," said Hal.

"Uncle Henry is there already, and can do nothing," said Jack.

Then Maudlen suddenly broke down and cried. "O brothers, brothers, take me and let me go! I will speak—I care not whom I speak to for their lives! and maybe they might hear a woman speak when they will not listen to a man. And if it is not safe for a woman to be on the roads, I will dress up as a boy——"

She went out of the room, and in a very few minutes she returned in boy's dress; her hair cut short to the length which was then usually worn, a soft cloth cap upon her head, and her slight girlish figure arrayed in short tunic and doublet. "Will, Jack, Hal," she said, "one of you *must* come with me to Chelmsford. I will do all talking, and I will take my gown and coif in a bundle, so that I may turn maiden again as soon as we are in safety. But we must not let Alan die if we may save him!"

"'Tis strange," said Jack, who stickled for propriety, "for a young maiden to go forth and put herself into danger for one that is no kin to her."

"He is more than kin, and father knows it!" said Maudlen passionately. "And I tell you this, brothers, if he dies, and father dies, it will be

my death too—the more if I feel that he might have been saved and was not ! ”

Will stood up. “ Brothers, we have but one sister, and we cannot serve our father by sitting here idle, and Alan also has been to us as a brother. Where lives be at stake, it is foolish to stickle for this and that, that she should do and should not do. Wherefore I propose that you twain, Jack and Hal, abide here to see if aught can be done here for our good father, and that I ride to Chelmsford with her. Since she is to take refuge with our uncle Henry, by our father’s desire, it matters little if she join him at Chelmsford or London. Nay, nay, silly wench, throttle me not, but be discreet, and get thyself and me into no straits.”

Accordingly, not very long after noon that day, Will, with a boy behind him on his horse and two stout serving-men following on theirs, rode out of the town gate to go by cross roads to Chelmsford. The boy pulled his cap down over his brows and sheltered his face against Will’s broad back till he was out of the well-known streets : after that he was more at ease, and only incurred Will’s reproof for saying plaintively from time to time, “ Could we not make better speed, brother Will ? ”

The news they met on the road were not encouraging. Lord Thomas Percy, who was to come

down to St Albans to coerce the town into quietness, had routed the bands of St George who had taken refuge in the Billericay woods: most had been slain, but five hundred had surrendered, and these had had their lives given them on condition that they gave up twenty-four of the ring-leaders. Of these nineteen were hanged upon the gallows, among them Thomas Scott and Peter Bungay.

"Our Alan would have been strung up too had he been there," said Will to Maudlen, slowly.

"The point is that he was elsewhere," said Maudlen quickly. "When the King said the messengers were to go back and give their message and then go home, Alan obeyed. They can have nought against him, seeing that he obeyed the King."

At last they reached Chelmsford, and Maudlen, going into an inn near the entrance of the town, changed back into her girl's dress and walked up the street with her brother to the lodging where her uncle lay. It cannot be said that his first motion was one of welcome: he had enough upon his hands without a distressed niece, but when she explained matters, he forgave her for her inopportune appearance, and agreed that if she could get hold of Hugh de Rivers and interest him in her

cause, it might open the door for the audience of the King which Henry Grindecobbe was waiting for and had hitherto been unable to obtain.

"And how can I get hold of the gentleman?" said Maudlen.

"The best is to write a letter," said Henry Grindecobbe, "but I am no good scribe; I leave that to my clerk. Canst thou write, nephew?"

"My sister writes better than any of us."

"Sayest thou so? For me, I care not to have women learnt to write, but my brother Will ever had his fancies. Come then, niece, sit thee down and write."

"What shall I call myself? If I give my name of Grindecobbe, will not that set the gentleman against me?" said Maudlen.

"Aye, maybe thou art right. Well, thy father's christened name is William; call thyself Williams, for that is no lie."

So Maudlen wrote:—

"To the worshipful Master,

HUGH DE RIVERS, Esquire,

Now with the army of His Grace the King at Chelmsford.

WORSHIPFUL SIR,—We do you to wit by these presents that one Alan Harding, sometime called

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 235

from his trade Alan Leech, who once did you service with the bands of St George at Romford, lieth now in prison at Hertford in great danger of death, though not having done aught to deserve it : and he prayeth you to redeem your pledge that you would stand his friend in need. Wherefore if you would hear more of his need, the writer of this, being his betrothed wife and true lover, would fain tell you of all his case, and implore you that for the love of God you would stand to your word. To be heard of at the Saracen's Head in the High Street, Chelmsford. MAUDLEN WILLIAMS.

Her uncle took the letter and promised to see that it reached De Rivers' hands, as far as in him lay, and hour after hour for some days Maudlen sat by the dim latticed glass, which scarcely allowed anyone to see what passed in the street, hoping in vain that it would produce some effect. Towards the afternoon of the third day, her brother and her uncle thought that the court dinner hour would prevent any visit, and went out, taking care to bid the landlady of the Saracen's Head keep the young gentlewoman company if any gentleman came to see her ; but it was at this very moment that a richly attired youth, in his black and gold suit and with black plumes in his cap, found his way to the

236 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

Saracen's Head and asked if a young gentlewoman by name Williams were lodging there. The chaperon landlady bustled forward, and brought Hugh de Rivers into the presence of the town maiden, and the squire bowed and the lady curtsied in a way which put the gestures of their lazier descendants to shame.

"Are you, mistress," said Hugh, "the writer of a letter to me concerning one Alan Harding?"

"I am, sir. I pray you pardon me if it were a liberty, for indeed I knew not what else to do," said Maudlen.

"Well," said Hugh, "I thank you for telling me of his trouble, but indeed I know not if it be in my power to aid him, however good may be my will. Where is he now?"

"Alack, sir, he is in prison at Hertford, and they may hang him any day," said poor Maudlen.

"At Hertford? hath he then been out with those evil-minded St Albans rebels?" said Hugh de Rivers.

"Ah, sir, we are not evil-minded," said Maudlen, her eyes filling with tears: "and my poor Alan hath done nothing against the law, no more than my poor father."

"Thy father—is he in trouble too? Williams—I know not the name."

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 237

Maudlen coloured crimson to her ears. "Sir," she said tremulously, "many of them who love the King best be now in prison for opposing the Abbot. But, indeed, Alan Harding hath been taken, not for any ill-deed at St Albans, but because when he was in Essex, he went to Waltham as messenger from the bands that had gathered at Billericay, to pray the King to speak to their lords who would not obey his command, and respect the charters, though sealed with his own seal; and though the King was angry, he bade them go back with their message to those that had sent them, and then to their homes—and that, sir, Alan Harding did, as he was bidden, but now they say because he was out with the Essexmen he must be hanged, and will not hear a word to say he hath done no wrong"—Here, in spite of all her efforts poor Maudlen began to cry.

"Mistress," said Hugh, who was like his mother, kindly and ready to do what he could to help the unhappy, "I would indeed I could get you speech of the King, that you might tell your own tale before him. But I fear I can give you but little help. He is loath that the name of the bands of St George should come even into his ears, and he will not hear of any pardon to any. Why, there

has been a fellow from St Albans here this week or more, praying and entreating, first one and then another of the court to get him speech of the King, to pray for the life of his brother, what is his name? Grim—Green—aye, Grindecobbe, that is it—and there is not one that can prevail upon the King to give him a hearing. What didst say thy father's name was, mistress?"

"Sir," said Maudlen, "I will not deceive you. My father is William Grindecobbe — the best father that ever was—and I had hoped, if I could have prayed for Alan's life through your kind help, to pray for my father's too."

Hugh shook his head sadly. "Nay, fair mistress, I fear you must give up all hope as to that. Grindecobbe is beyond help. But as for Alan Harding, though I may not get you a sight of the King to pray to him for the young man's life, yet what I can do I will. I will keep before my mind his sad case, so that if I get a chance to speak to the King on his behalf, sometime, when he is in a milder mood, I may do so. And for your comfort, I will tell you this. If my Lord Warwick or my Lord Percy come to St Albans, I think they will keep the prisoners to bring out before them; and I think they may be delayed, for news have come that my Lord Warwick must

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 239

go back to his estates at once to quell the rising there. Therefore I think there will be no hanging for some days at least."

And with this comfort, cold as it was, poor Maudlen had to content herself.

CHAPTER XIX

THE removal of Grindecobbe to prison for the second time left the town in worse condition than ever, for now it was practically leaderless. After much debate, on the Saturday evening on which he was taken back to Hertford, Master Martin and others of his party determined to go to the Abbot and tell him that after all the townsmen had made up their minds to return the charters, "for," said they, "if Warwick and Percy sack the town and rob us of our women and of our lives, of what use will be the rights of fishery or pasture which we won on St Alban's eve?" Accordingly they brought back the book of the agreements between town and minster which had been given up by the Abbot, and Prior Killingworth of Wymondham was sent to take this book from them; but as to the charters, the Abbot now refused to receive them unless they also brought with them two hundred pounds in gold, which, if they brought next day, he would be graciously pleased to accept. But

nothing was done on the Sunday, as the two hundred pounds had to be collected, and in the evening a ray of hope dawned upon the burgesses. Warwick had marched his men to his own estate to put down the rising there, and was not coming at present to St Albans. Some said that this was the Abbot's doing, that he had no mind to see the crops on the fat Abbey lands eaten up by the King's troops ; and now the townsmen took heart once more, and said that they would never give up their freedom except to save their bare lives. They met again, and the bolder spirits carried the others with them when they said, " Truly we be fools. Shall we be the first to yield, and that when Grindecobbe and his fellows have chosen death rather than to give up our freedom ? " But as it seemed to them necessary to invent an excuse for their change of policy, they told the Abbot that for fear of the men of Barnet and Watford they dared not give up their charters, lest they should be offended with them, and being armed should attack the town.

All this was doubtless annoying enough to the Abbot, but what annoyed him most was a doggerel song which every man, woman and child knew by heart during that week, and which every urchin in the streets of St Albans struck up whenever he saw one of the brethren outside the Abbey walls. The

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242 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

Abbot was supposed to have laid in great stores to feast Warwick and Percy, who were not coming, and the song, rendered into modern English, ran thus—

Abbot Thomas maketh
Ready for a feast :
Heats his ovens, milks his kine,
Slays full many a beast :
Everything is ready,
Tables spread to-day ;
But the guests, where be they ?
All have marched away.
Salt thy flesh, good Abbot,
Bake full hard thy flour,
Sell thy goodly butter,
Lest it turneth sour !

This not very scathing sarcasm hit the Abbot deeply. He was already annoyed with the non-return of the promised charters ; but when insult was added to injury, and no one could go into the town but that some saucy boy or girl sang, "Salt thy flesh, good Abbot, bake full hard thy flour," his wrath passed all bounds. He sent his squires to Chelmsford to complain to the King of the contumely put upon him ; and when Richard heard that even after his Commissioner had come down and laid the ring-leaders in prison, the charters were not returned and the Abbot was insulted, he swore a great oath that he would have no more delay, but would come

himself to St Albans, and make an end of the whole coil.

So it was that on the Friday after Grindecobbe's return to prison, news came to St Albans that the King would himself be there next day, and great was the terror of the townsmen. Those who had wished to return the charters rated those who had been for withholding them, and those who had withheld them told the others that but for their faint hearts the Abbot would never have expected to get them back. Then, in great haste, they went to a gentleman of the neighbourhood, Sir William Crosier, and begged him to intercede for them with the Abbot; and the end of it all, as far as they were concerned, was that they agreed to restore the charters, to pay the two hundred pounds to the Abbot, to replace new millstones in the pavement of the Parlour, and to rebuild the houses of the Prior and the Sub-chancellor, which had been wrecked on St Alban's Eve. And all these, except the rebuilding of the houses, were done before nightfall on the same day, that they might be reconciled with the Abbot before the King came.

On Saturday the King arrived, and with him Sir Robert Tresilyan, who had already been holding his court in Essex as Lord High Justiciary and had condemned to death all the leaders of the rising who

had not already been hanged at Newgate. Their first act was to send messengers to Hertford, to bring back Grindecobbe, Cadyndon and Barber to be tried ; and with them also came Alan Harding, whom the jail authorities considered one of the same batch. The King and the Justiciary went in solemn procession to vespers in the Abbey church, and thence to the Moot Hall, where the first business on hand was to call together a jury to convict the malefactors—or rather the patriots—whom he was to try. But though the townsmen of St Albans had yielded up all for which Grindecobbe and the others had fought, they were not yet so tame in the Abbot's grasp as to deliver up to death those who had offered their lives for them ; and when they had called a jury and sworn them in, and bidden them indict the malefactors, the jury replied that they knew of no malefactors, and could neither indict nor convict any. The jury stood to their purpose for a while, but at last, under threats of death as traitors, they were persuaded to indict those who were already in custody, with the determination not to convict them. A second and third jury, however, were summoned, and by considerable juggling with the truth, they were persuaded that the first jury had convicted, and brought to follow suit, and thus the Justiciary finally managed to get

his convictions carried out, though not by the same jury as had indicted the prisoners. Such were the tricks of justice in those days, which made men long to hang the lawyers.

On the morning after the King's arrival the trial began. The weary, white-faced prisoners stood all the blinding July day in the Moot Hall, crowded together, to the number of nearly two hundred: each had but a very short trial, for the time was short, and their conviction a foregone conclusion. First of all came the tall gaunt figure of John Ball in his ragged cassock; he had been apprehended in Essex, and brought to St Albans to be tried with the rest. His trial was brief. Someone brought forward a copy of that letter beginning "John Chepe St Mary Priest of York, and now of Colchester," which had been copied out and distributed to the bands of St George at Mile End. He was asked whether he was the author, and replied quietly that he was. Next William Grindecobbe was called, and asked whether he confessed to have taken the six millstones from the Abbot's Parlour. He replied, "I did so," and they went on to the next, and the next after him. When Alan Harding was called, he was asked whether or not he had been with the rebels at Billericay after the King's proclamation of June 13, Alan tried to say that he had not broken

the peace, but Richard Perrers whispered to the Justiciary that he was a perjured young rebel, and that he himself had seen him in the company of the rioters ; and the Justiciary cut his plea short, and passed on to the next case. One of the minor criminals, condemned to be hanged with the rest, was the poor boy who had taken the rabbit off the warren and put it into the pillory ; the "seisin" of a rabbit from church lands was on this occasion called sacrilege. Finally, without exception—though the sentence of some was afterwards commuted for imprisonment—all were sentenced to be drawn on a hurdle to the gallows, and there hanged in chains ; and John Ball was condemned not only to be hanged, but also drawn and quartered, and his head set upon London Bridge. This last sentence would have been carried out within the hour, but that Bishop William of London prayed that John Ball might be reprieved till Monday, that he might have one day more granted him for repentance.

As to the inner history of the prisoners, of which the Abbey chronicler does not speak, we must go for it to a crabbedly written manuscript which seems to have been penned by Alan Harding for the comfort of the Grindecobbe family, some years after the Hurling-time was over. The beginning is want-

ing, but the portion that is left seems to begin with William Grindecobbe's return to prison on Saturday, July 5. It is of course rendered into modern English.

. . . two books, one, the Psalter, for himself, and the other, the Vision of Piers Plowman, for me, knowing that this was a book I had always loved to read. We could not read except in the mid-day hours, but I learnt by heart many good words out of both books, so that I could repeat them in the darkness. Sometimes also we would sing catches, especially Master Barber and I, to pass the time: but Master Grindecobbe loved better to hear a godly psalm than "God save you Dame Emma," and my training as chorister stood me in good stead, so that there were few which I could not chant.

My good master spoke very little, but sat for the most part silent during the day, answering when spoken to in a kind and friendly tone, but wrapped in his own thoughts, and reading, when he could see, in his Psalter. It was the 88th psalm, *Domine Deus*, which he seemed to read the most, and one day he said to me, "Methinks this psalm must have been writ by a man who knew what it is to lie in hopeless prison, feeling that all wherefor he has wagered his life and the lives of others hath failed, and no man the better for it." He told me later that

248 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

he had gone through a very dark hour at that time, but he bore it by himself, and would not let us know what it cost him. One night, however, when we were both wakeful, lying on the straw, and our prison-mates were asleep, we began to speak privately together : and he told me that he had seen that Maudlen's heart was inclined to me, and mine to her, and that though more than one offer had been made to him of marriage for her, he had always hoped that he might have been able to put me into a worldly condition in which she might have wedded me : " for," said he, " though there be many worthy men and good housekeeping women, each of whom will make an honest mate to the other, I, who wedded and lost the love of my youth, know that there is a joy in the inclination of the heart for which a man may well yield goods and gold. And," said he, " I have writ to my brother that if ever things so turn that thou escape, I will that he spend some of that money that he hath in charge in setting thee up in some honest trade, that thou mayest wed my child."

I said that I had no expectation to escape.

" None can forecast the future," he said. " No fair judge could give sentence against thee, seeing thou hast in no wise broken the King's peace since he pardoned all at Mile End. But yet I would not

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 249

bid thee raise thy hopes : it is better to trust in God's mercy than in man's."

So matters went on through that week ; and on Saturday, July 12, the bailiffs came into the jail and ordered us at once to come to our trial : and they told us that all we had striven for was yielded again to the Abbot, and that the charters and parchments for which Master Grindecobbe had given his life and ours were now back again in the Abbot's treasury, and the town in worse bondage than before.

Then, as we stood together for the fetters to be unlocked from our feet, Master Barber said to Grindecobbe, "'Twas pity thou didst not make bargain for our lives with that which hath now been surrendered for nought. A wiser man would have seen where to hold out and where to yield." It was naught but testiness that made him speak thus and Grindecobbe bowed his head and could make no answer. Whereat I, standing near him, clasped his hand to let him know that I at least bore him no grudge, and he gripped mine in return with a strong grasp which seemed to send strength into my heart, and withal a strange joy, that helpless though I might be to aid him, being in the same trouble, yet I could at least make him feel my love and trust towards him.

We were carried to St Albans, and tried in the

Moot Hall with a hundred and eighty more, John Ball being one, and being condemned to death, we were taken to the Abbey and thrust into the dungeons to await our execution. And so full were the dungeons that we should well-nigh have died of heat and want of air, had not the brethren compassionately bidden them keep open the trap-door above the stairs, which was guarded above by two men-at-arms with drawn swords. Master Grindecobbe and I were chained together, the Abbot not having gyves enough for so many prisoners ; and not far off was John Ball, near whom a Brother was kneeling, urging him to make a full confession before his end. When we were all in this black pit, another Brother came down the stairs with a light, and cast it upon our faces, walking gingerly in the lane that was left betwixt the human bodies, that had not room to lie, and could but sit uneasily together. And when he saw Grindecobbe's face he set down the lantern, and knelt down beside him and embraced him, saying, "My dear friend, my true and faithful gossip! Thank God we meet once more!"

It was Brother Raymond, who had come from his Suffolk parish, praying that he might be allowed to minister to the prisoners before their death, for he, good man, was ever to be found where men were

in most wretched case. Only the priests of the Abbey might come to us to shrive us before our death : and as for poor John Ball, the priest never left him all that long Sunday, seeking to win him to such confessions as Straw had made before him, so that at last Master Ball was wearied out, saying, " God, before whom I shall stand to-morrow, knows what the hopes of my heart were," and after this he spoke no more. But Brother Raymond was not like this man ; and I have heard him say that he should count it a special grace of God if when his time came he should make as good an end as William Grindecobbe. And with ghostly comfort and exhortations he quieted our souls, and those of many other poor men, and on Sunday morning brought us the Holy Bread, and did all for us that a good priest may do for the dying.

But even Brother Raymond's ministrations were not of so much help to me as the words my master said, and the sight of his brave steadfastness, he being in the same evil case as I, and yet enduring it with so great piety and patience. He told me how dark the days had seemed when he was brought back to Hertford ; how he seemed to have given his life for the help of his fellows, and given it in vain, and they none the better for it ; and that it had then seemed to him as if he had been cheated

252 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

when he was acting in all good faith, and as if God Almighty had been a party to the false bargain ; and said he, when a man loses his faith in God, life and death are black to him alike. But he thanked God that hour had passed away, and that he knew now that though it was not for him to save England from oppression—aye, though even by his mistakes he might have done harm to the cause he died for—yet other men would triumph in his stead. “For,” said he, “God Almighty is for justice and righteousness, and against wrong and oppression ; and He is stronger than the devil with all the kings and lords and abbots that ever lived at his back ; and if we fall, yet other men will conquer, and all will be set right in the end.”

And for my fellow-prisoners, I will say that they bore themselves like men and Christians, for we were all minded to make a good end that should not shame us, and though many groaned for unease or the weight of their chains, none like cravens bewailed their coming death. Yet it was an awful thought to feel how the moments were flying that were to bring us to our end, and how the sun was going down upon his course and none could hold him back, though it was the last noon and the last eventide we should ever see for at sunrise we were to die. More than once the dread of it overcame

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 253

me, and I breathed hard ; and then Master Grindecobbe would say, "Never fear, lad, it will soon be over," and I recovered heart again.

When night came, I was minded to wake all night for my soul's sake, but weariness overcame me, and I slept and did not wake until in the morning the turnkeys had come down the stairs and were unlocking the fetters of the prisoners. Then a great horror came over me, and I quaked, so that my chains rattled together ; but Master Grindecobbe said, "Fear not, dear lad. Keep up a good heart for but a short while longer." And as I still trembled, he said, "Let us say those good words of Piers Plowman which Repentance saith for the sinners who kneel and confess their sins," and together we repeated the words he spoke of : "Thou camest not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance ; and Thy bravest deeds were done in our armour : and by so much we may the more surely pray and beseech Thee, that art our Father and our Brother, be merciful to us."

Then came one of the Brethren with bread and sack for us who were about to die ; but I could not swallow it, though with those good words my trembling had passed away. Then our names were cried one by one in order of letters, and when Grindecobbe's name was cried I followed him

straight up the steps, for I knew no other name came betwixt Grindecobbe and Harding, and I hoped I should die next to him. When I reached the upper air the light well-nigh blinded me, but I stood with the rest by the Abbey gate, where they should bind us on hurdles to draw us to the gallows. I saw them bind Grindecobbe on his, looking as much at peace as though the death he went to meet were already past; and I looked to be bound next upon mine. But they thrust me aside and took one Heaton, who was next after me; and I saw Master Grindecobbe smile at me as his hurdle was dragged away. He guessed, I think, that I was reprieved. But I was grieved to think I had lost my chance of dying next my master, and I said to the jailor, "'Tis my turn first; Harding comes before Heaton."

Then the turnkey grinned in my face and said, "Never saw I a knave so eager for his halter! Sure thou knowest thy deserts best. I will see to thee when I have sped the rest."

I stood by, still unknowing what this meant, and from time to time others were thrust aside with me—in all, when the tale was told, eighty men, Richard of Wallingford being one of them. When all had been dealt with, these were taken away back to prison; but none called me, and, I stood

leaning against the wall, thinking that if I were to be imprisoned afresh, I would fain they had made an end of me with my master. At last the turnkey gave me a shove into one of the chambers near by, and said, "Methinks there is a Brother there who hath a pardon for thee, though I doubt it is more than thy deserts."

And sure enough there was my old friend the Precentor, and with him Thomas Piper and a pardon; but I could only bury my head on my arms and weep so that I could not stay myself. I could scarce be glad that I was saved, while they who were nobler and better than I were one by one passing to their death; nor could I understand what it was they spake about Hugh de Rivers and a pardon from the King, since then I had not learnt how my betrothed had herself travelled to Chelmsford, and there . . .

Here the manuscript breaks off, though there are one or two fragments which we may quote in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XX

WILLIAM GRINDECOPBE was dead and out of this troublesome world, much to his own peace ; but the troublesome world went on its way. Alan lay for many days at the point of death from jail fever ; but he was carefully tended, and after a while he ceased to see the gibbet before his eyes, and to cry why would they not let him follow Master Grindecobbe to his death ? At last he was able to sit in Thomas Piper's parlour, while the young Grindecobbes stood round him, to tell him all that was to be told of the doings in the town since the King departed, and he on his side told them of their father's last days. Maudlen was at her uncle's in London, and Alan was to go to Henry Grindecobbe as soon as he was well able to travel, which as yet was not the case.

It was not a cheering recital that greeted Alan's ears. All through those dreary dog-days the sun beat down upon the wasted land and burnt up the pasture, and there seemed to be no joy in his

beams, because of that grim row of corpses hanging on the great gallows outside the town, whence the wind brought a taint that poisoned the air as from a field of battle. The townsmen were no better pleased with the Abbot after the King departed than before he came ; and though the point of the song about Abbot Thomas's feast had been taken away when the army came after all, and ate the Abbot's provisions (and other people's also), the Abbot did not get over the soreness it had engendered. He set his spies to report what was said about him among the townsmen—hardly a dignified proceeding ; and as listeners seldom hear any good of themselves, he naturally heard much that he had best have left unheard. The people said his sanctity was a hypocritical pretence, through which he sought to obtain power ; he had robbed the burgesses of their laws and liberties by force ; he desired to make serfs of the townsmen by setting them to grind corn at his mill ; he had paid the King much gold to induce him to come to punish the town ; and the women would not give a civil good-morrow to any man of the Abbot's party. But what infuriated the Abbot most was a stricture which had in it truth enough to make it sting. He would have liked to forget the panic which had seized him when Tiler had come to

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Highbury, but the townsmen had not forgotten it. They whispered that if they were traitors for having had dealings with the bands of St George, the Abbot was a traitor too ; and the soldiers who had come into the town, who being free Englishmen, had no special predilection in favour of abbots, were found to have adopted this view of the holy Thomas de la Mare.

The Abbot seems to have imagined that he could not only conquer the townsmen in a political struggle, but also stop their tongues ; and he had sent his bailiffs round the town to make proclamation that whereas the townsmen and townswomen were known to speak slanderously against Abbot Thomas, to say that he had acted unlawfully to their hurt and damage, and to trouble with their tongues him and his servants ; henceforth every man convicted of such false speaking against the said Abbot Thomas should be hanged, and every woman so convicted burnt at the stake, that they might learn to reverence the Abbot Thomas and his master, the holy Alban.

This proclamation was hardly calculated to appease the townsmen, though we do not hear that any prosecutions followed ; Hal told Alan that when they spoke of the Abbot now they called him John the Smith, and that worse things

were said of John the Smith than had ever been spoken of Thomas de la Mare. Men met together secretly and vowed that the Abbot should see that they were not serfs, even if he had taken their ancient liberties from them, and they determined to take down the bodies of the hanged men from the gibbet, and give them Christian burial. The plan was carefully arranged. On a moonless night men were to climb the gibbet, and sitting astride it, unfasten the bodies and lower them to their friends below, who were to wait with biers to receive them, and carry them off to graves already dug in different churchyards outside the walls, where they should be bestowed before morning.

This was August, and by this time Alan had well-nigh recovered his strength, though he had been far too ill on St Margaret's day to swear allegiance to the King, as all men in Hertfordshire between sixteen and sixty had been called on to do. Thomas Piper had taken him before a justice to take his oath as soon as he was able to walk. This was considered to have white-washed his possible disaffection, and he could now show himself about the town without fearing even the Abbot's spies. His first intention had been to go to London as soon as possible, but when he heard of the plan

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260 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

of taking the bodies down and burying them, he felt that he could not be left out of the last respect that could be shown to Grindecobbe. He with Grindecobbe's three sons would be able to make up a family party of bearers, and they determined to bury him in a little deserted graveyard on St Bernard's heath, belonging to a little chapel which had fallen into ruins. This was not far from Saundridge, where Brother Raymond was placed for a time in charge of the church—as some said, to be under the Abbot's eye in case he were too gentle to the disaffected ; and Alan and the Grindecobbes determined to ask him, later in the week, to say a mass for their father's soul in Saundridge church.

All was carefully arranged, but someone by treachery or inadvertence betrayed the design. A few bodies were removed from the gibbet, and the first of all was William Grindecobbe's, out of the honour which all felt towards him ; and his friends put the body on the bier, and carried it off at once to St Bernard's heath. But they had not got a quarter of a mile on their road, before the Abbot's men surrounded the gibbet, and came upon those who were removing the other bodies. Some they caught, others, in the darkness, they missed ; and those who were carrying away the bodies for the

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 261

most part thought it best to leave them and make their own escape. The Grindecobbes and Alan drew their burden into a covert of gorse and brambles, and covered it with a black cere-cloth, so that none could see it ; and there they lay hidden while the Abbot's men hunted up and down the road. But when all were gone, they took up the body again, carried it to St Bernard's heath, and buried it reverently, filling in the grave and dragging across it clumps of bracken and heather, that no one might see that the earth had been disturbed. This being achieved, they made their way to Saundridge, where Raymond gave them shelter for a few days, until there was no longer danger lest they should be laid hold of by the Abbot's men who watched the London roads ; and saw St Albans no more for many a long day.

Few of the others had been so happy in achieving their object. The Abbot's squires at once rode off to complain to King Richard, who was now staying with his court at Easthampstead ; and before long another proclamation from the King was read by the town-crier at the market cross. This was to say that since the rioters had been hanged by his express order, with commands that they should remain on the gallows until the bodies dropped from their chains, the men of St Albans were

262 THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE

commanded to take them and hang them in their chains as before. We may read in the Chronicle of the spiteful joy of the chronicler, who describes with unseemly delight the decay of the month-old corpses, and the fact that some of the chains having been lost, the townsmen took chains from their dogs to replace them ; but William Grindecobbe's grave remained undiscovered, and no one but his own family and Alan, who kept the matter secret, knew where it was that he lay.

It was within a few days after this that Alan made his way to Henry Grindecobbe's in London, where Maudlen was already established as a member of her uncle's household. She had grown paler and graver and older under the stress of these terrible weeks, but the old light came to her eyes and the old rose to her cheeks when she saw Alan, and told him with tears and smiles that never could she have wed any but one who like him had stood by her dear father to the death. Henry Grindecobbe accepted the charge laid on him by his brother, and though he did not scruple to let Alan know what an exceedingly bad match he thought him for Maudlen, he arranged that the young man should go through the full training of a London apothecary, and when this was over and Alan was established creditably in

his profession, he married Maudlen and lived with her a long and happy life.

Before leaving him, we will give the final fragment of his MS., which appears to relate to the funeral mass for William Grindecobbe, performed shortly after his burial by the ex - prior Raymond, now acting as parish priest in the village of Saund-ridge.

And it befell that just as the sacring bell was sounding, a couple of huntsmen, with two retainers behind, drew up by the church door, and one looked in. "Ho, good Hugh," said a young voice, "here is a hunter's mass ready to our hand, and we will lay something to our account with heaven while Potter takes Swift to be shod at the forge." And two young huntsmen came in, and knelt down ; and my heart well-nigh stopped, for they were the King himself, and Hugh de Rivers.

Brother Raymond knew also who was there, and a change came over his voice. At the beginning of mass he had sung low, as one loath to call attention to the service he was celebrating ; but when he knew the King all his caution departed, and he spake loud and clear. And William Grindecobbe's name he spake out with joy and pride, and the King started and looked at his squire. But the

mass went on, and was ended, and the tapers were extinguished, and the holy wafer placed back in the shrine. And then, while the Grindecobbes still knelt on, not knowing who was in the church, I rose to stand by Brother Raymond, in case that any harm came to him for that he had done. But bidding me with a wave of his hand to remain in my place near the door, he walked down the church with a stately step, into the porch, where stood the King with the sun upon his goodly form, and his golden hair a-glitter in the morning light.

When the King beheld the mass-priest, he took out his pouch to bestow a coin or two upon him for the poor, but his countenance was displeased.

"I scarce thought to have heard an Abbey brother say mass for a traitor," said he.

"May it please your Grace," said Brother Raymond, "he for whom I have said mass was no traitor, but a good and holy man, and I would that my soul might need masses as little as his, whom I shrived at his last hour."

"Why say mass for him at all?" said the King petulantly, looking down towards the forge for signs of his new-shod horse.

"Because," said Raymond, "there is room for

many prayers that he may not have died in vain, and that the poor and needy souls he loved may not again suffer the same sore oppression wherefrom he sought to save them, and that their lords may remember that they have a Master in heaven, who will mete to them as they have meted to others."

The King cast down his eyes and moved away ; Hugh de Rivers would have followed him, but he waved him off with some impatience. As the squire stood there, I went to him, and said, "Sir, I am Alan Harding, and I would fain thank you for interceding for my life, as I deem you must have done."

"Ah, Alan Harding, who was so near hanged ? One good turn deserves another, good Alan, and if I had not owed thee a good turn, methinks I must have wagered somewhat for the sake of that fair and courageous little maiden, thy betrothed. But indeed"—he laughed, "I had a hard matter to get thy pardon from the King, for when he had sealed it with his seal, he threw it at me, as a bone to a dog."

"Alack," I said, "his heart is indeed changed since that day at Mile End when he won all our love by his graciousness, and we thought he loved his poor commons."

“Good Alan,” said Hugh de Rivers speaking more gravely, “the King is but a lad, though he be a king, and this has been a hard time for him. It is true that since he has again been tutored by his uncles, it has angered him to be asked for mercy to the villans ; but methinks this is because it stings him to recall the generous hopes he had that he might set all things right, and their baffling through the will of those that he might not bend to his own. But I must follow him ; farewell.”

We feared that Raymond might suffer for his bold words, but he heard no more of the matter, and methought what he had said bore fruit when the King brought before Parliament his desire that villanage should be abolished (though Parliament would not have it so), and when next year he wedded Queen Anne, and pardoned such of the bands of St George as yet lay in prison. And now that all this is long past and over, I think sometimes that King Richard was rather to be pitied than over-blamed. For when I think of him, I see him a gallant boy, as I saw him in his fair youth ; and methinks again I see his unhappy corpse as it looked when King Henry brought it from Pontefract to satisfy the citizens of London of his death. And I remember that he who said that the bonds of the poor should be harder than before died himself in

THE BANNER OF ST GEORGE 267

bondage, and he who sent them back to want perished himself of hunger. Yet by God's mercy it may be that he thus expiated his sins for the salvation of his soul, whereto may I and mine attain one day. Amen.

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